

A Matter of Personal Preference

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A Matter of Personal Preference

by [ashilrak](#)

Summary

12 young men were to be brought into the palace with the goal of winning the King's affections.

Alexander Hamilton was never one to back down from a challenge.

Notes

This was inspired by The Selection series by Kiera Cass

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

It was an archaic process, one intended to find the most suitable whores. The role of Consort had greatly shifted over the years, but tradition and precedent dictated how these things were to be done.

George had been married, to a beautiful woman named Martha. It had been far from the typical marriage, as he had been her second husband and she had brought children into the marriage. It was hardly the done thing for the royal family, but George hadn't been the heir, and the Washingtons had always prided themselves on their modern perspective.

But then Lawrence died, and George became King.

There had been ceremonies and meetings and a coronation and a ball, but it had all passed by in a blur for George. Martha had been by his side throughout the entire thing, and the children had been upset at all the formalities they had to suffer through.

Years had passed, and Jack was the young heir to America, serving his time in the military. Martha was dead, and George was still King. He was loved by the people, seen as stern but fair, and the fact that he cut quite the dashing figure didn't go unappreciated.

George sometimes felt that the royal family wasn't meant to last much longer, with how easily they all seemed to fall to illness. He had simply accepted his place, but his responsibilities became more and more of a burden as time went by and his family passed on.

Martha had caught a fever, thought she had insisted she was fine. When it got worse, she refused to see any doctors, despite having access to the best medical care in the country.

Before he knew it, George was alone.

5 years later, George Washington, King of the United States of America, sat at the head of a table full of the men making up his council. These were the men that he had grown up with, had seen their fathers advise his father - had seen them advise his brother, and now they advised him.

George admired these men greatly, but at that moment, he did not particularly like them.

His mourning period was up.

He was more than aware of what these men wanted from him, and he was also aware that ultimately, his opinion meant nothing. Many might believe that the King has ultimate ruling, but truly that only held in the matter of the veto. If he was being presented with something, it had to have gone through many channels to reach him, and he had to take that into consideration. These men knew that George didn't want to go through with this, so that they were bringing it up anyway meant that there were hundreds of people who believed it wise.

And George was nothing if not a wise king.

It was Philip Schuyler who spoke first.

"Your Majesty, I know that this is not what you want to hear, but we believe that it is time to host a Selection. Your mourning period is up, and soon there will be people looking to garner your attention. By claiming a Consort, we avoid any political strife by choosing one connection over another, and we will also manage to avoid conflict within our own court. And I believe it will

encourage the people to see you in love again.”

If this conversation were happening in a more friendly capacity, George would have raised an eyebrow, but since it was not, he kept his face blank as he replied, “You believe that I will fall in love through a Selection? You know my opinions on such things.”

It was another voice who responded, this time belonging to Friedrich Wilhelm Von Steuben, a man George was comfortable calling a friend, “Yes, your majesty, we all know that you believe that the Selection is nothing more than a way to get your sampling of the finest whores throughout the land before you’re obligated to choose your favorite.”

A man coughed.

“But, we also all know that the role of Consort has gained some meaning and political importance, thanks to your family. Besides, we could make it a game of sorts - not that it isn’t already. We’ve all known you for years, I imagine we’d be able to find you a good match. We’ll be the ones to parse through the candidates, and bring them in based on how well we believe they’d suit the role, and you. Not just how trim their figure is, or how pretty their face.”

“You want to make it a game to find me a love match.”

Adams spoke next, “A love match might be pushing it, your Majesty, but I’m sure we could find you a decent companion. We can make an education a qualifier, and make the first screening mandatory for whatever group we narrow it down to, to get the largest group to choose from.”

George folded his hands together before saying, “And what if we get 12 individuals who make it through the screening processes, but not a single one of them signed up because they wanted to, but because they were forced.”

“Actually, a mandatory screening might be the best idea. After all, there’s a good chance that those signing up willingly are just in it for the name and title.” Henry Knox’s voice rang clear through the chamber, “If we bring those who don’t want to be here in, at least you know that if they end up choosing to stay, it’s because of something you did.”

The king looked around the room at his council, seeing the stubborn set in their shoulders, and said, “You’re expecting the ten of you to be able to narrow down millions of names until you have twelve you believe to be a good match for myself and for the country.”

George felt something gleeful well up when he watched the realization cross his men’s faces, though he was careful to not let it show.

“Well, I do believe we’d have to narrow the initial pool that enter in order for this to be successful, but yes, I do think we’re capable of such a task. We want only the best for our King, after all.”

Gates’ gaze was particular shrewd as he spoke, and George realized that for at least some of his council, the conversation had been going exactly where they wanted it to. They had a plan, and they were close enough to carrying it out that they were letting it show.

“What do you have in mind for the initial pool?”

Adams was typically a quiet man, but it seemed that he was the one taking charge, “Well, we do believe that it might be wise to take on a male consort, if your proclivities align.”

A male consort would mean no children, which would mean no heir. George still had several years left in him. A male consort would be able to take the throne if the next in line were thought to be

unsuitable until a proper replacement was found. George was fully aware that his council, and most of his court did not believe that Jack would make a fine King. He also knew that if a family of high enough standing were to find an heir crowned consort, they'd become the ruling family.

George had no intention of being the King to see the Washington family die out, and that was why he had adopted Lafayette all those years ago.

He took a moment before speaking, deciding to allow them to think they had him unaware of their machinations, "And if I were to tell you that my proclivities do align?"

Friedrich let out a chuckle to his right, "Well, I promise you that we shall find you only the finest of young men to suit your desires."

The others laughed along, for not a single one of them truly believed that the beautiful young men Von Steuben claimed were his stewards and aides occupied solely their named positions.

"So only young, beautiful, and educated men for our King." Adams' squeaky voice went unnoticed by the others, but when his sentiment was repeated by Greene, approval was granted by the others.

When the men's heads turned towards George, he nodded.

And then his advisors started to plan.

All young men between the ages of twenty and twenty-five enrolled at a university would be required to send in their applications for the first round of screening, and they would leave this up to the universities to handle. Their aides would be given general criteria - a general impression of intelligence, and a look appropriate of the title of Consort - and send them forward to the council. The council men would split these up among themselves, and decide who to send through to the second round.

From there, the council and their aides would personally be interviewing the men selected. After the interviews, background would be looked at, and each councilmen would bring in their favorite picks where the ten advisors would decide on the twelve to invite to the palace.

The system was full of holes and there was plenty of room for favors to be granted, just like every Selection in their relatively young country's history. George hated it, but he had spent years being taught how to hide such negative opinions, and he left his men to do as they will, nodding when their eyes landed on him.

The meeting didn't last much longer, as the plans were very obviously already set.

George let them be, as King, he had the freedom to choose among those who they sent in. In fact, he didn't have to choose at all, he could turn every single young man away. The council would no doubt try to continue the Selection process, but it could take place a limitless number of times for all the laws regulating it.

The council was dismissed, and Friedrich lingered.

"George, I want you to know that I really am intending on sending young men who I believe would appeal to you in any setting. I've seen your eyes linger, friend, I know your type. And I know you, you're not going to want some lifeless pretty thing, you want someone who bites back and isn't intimidated by the crown."

He was right. They had known each other since childhood, and George was far from surprised to know that the other man had figured out his tastes. But he gave no verbal response, only a nod of

his head, for a King never knew who was listening.

Lafayette was waiting for him outside of the chambers, and his face immediately brightened upon seeing George.

The child had come into George's life at a young age, spending a season in the American court with his family. When time came for him to leave, Lafayette fought tooth and nail against his grandmother. The boy was orphaned, and George petitioned for adoption. He had Martha's support, and after clarifying that he was not to take Jack's place as heir, and simply be added to the line for the throne, it was done.

There was something to be said in favor of Lafayette; his joy was simply infectious. The King gave a small smile to his ward, before he started to make his way down the hall, Lafayette falling into step beside him.

"Did the council manage to get their claws into you this time?"

George sighed, "Unfortunately there is little I can do to reasonably refute their plans in this instance. There is going to be a Selection for a Consort, and I'm sure the announcements for the first round will be heading out shortly."

"It was already planned, then?"

The King nodded, "Yes, and the plan is riddled with holes and flaws and room for error, as always."

Lafayette laughed and said, "How do you feel about this? Are you expecting anything to actually result from the process, or are you just letting them go through with it to prove a point?"

He remained silent, gathering his thoughts before speaking, "I despise the history of the Selections, though I know that it is my action alone that will help keep the going-ons decent. I've decided that I won't go into it with the intention of turning all the young men away, but I do have my doubts."

George's ward turned to him and raised his brow, tone surprised as he said, "They're insisting on bringing in men? I thought these things typically pandered to the heteronormative traditions most of the council insists on."

The King didn't do anything to prevent the low chuckle from escaping as the two sat down in his study, "While there have been male selections before, you are right in that they are usually centered on bringing in the fairer sex. Of course, there were the few that didn't make any rules regarding gender, but that's a more recent development, as you know. They wanted to be able to reasonably narrow the pool to choose from, and there's the added bonus of no children being born from pairing between two men."

Lafayette pouted, and crossed his legs, "And here I was, looking forward to a baby in the family."

"Now, Gilbert, you know my opinions on infants."

His ward smiled, "Oh yes, you insist you despise them, but the moment one is placed in your arms, you positively melt."

George narrowed his eyes, and said, tone teasing, "I'll have you know that as a member of the royal family, and as figurehead of this country, I do not melt."

"Perhaps not as King, but as George Washington, you most certainly do."

He let out a low sound, “I’m afraid that I find myself unable to separate the two at this point.”

“And that is exactly why this Selection might be good for you,” Lafayette was leaning forward in his chair now, “a bit of young blood to bring some life to the palace.”

“On that note, I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Whatever you need, sir.”

“I would like for you to be involved in the Selection process, and get to know the 12 chosen. After all, you’ll have to live with them too, if one of them ends up earning the title.”

Lafayette’s eyes were sparkling when he replied, “Of course sir, I’d be honored.”

George nodded slowly, feeling the worry rise with how visibly excited his ward was.

“Is that all, sir?”

Another nod and Lafayette had left the study, leaving the King alone with his thoughts.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The announcement was sent out and, as expected, garnered a mixed reception.

The tabloids and media were ecstatic - the stern, handsome widower King was reaching out into the Kingdom to bring some joy and life back into the palace, which had been in mourning for too long, in their humble opinion.

Of course, once the specifics came to light, the controversy arose. America's royal family had been much more liberal in recent years, and this was far from the first occurrence of a single gender selection, but the right-wing evangelicals raised a fuss nonetheless.

The families that had waited this day, and had been prepping their daughters for it were heartbroken. What use was mastering all of the King's hobbies if there wasn't even a chance of being brought in?

Hearts of girls like Peggy Shippen were crushed, and hope began to rise among the population of young men. Samuel Seabury squeaked when he saw the news.

Alexander Hamilton did no such thing.

Alexander Hamilton was sitting on the couch in his living room, hunched over his laptop, when Hercules Mulligan walked through the door and shoved a pink piece of paper in his face. Hercules was prepared for Alex to ball it up and throw it in the vague direction of the overflowing garbage can, and simply shoved an identical piece of paper into Alex's face again.

That paper received the same treatment, and Hercules repeated the process until his roommate finally looked up.

"Alex, you actually gotta do this, dude."

Hercules had long ago figured out that while it wasn't terribly difficult tolerating Alex, it was another thing entirely to consider him a close friend and actually live with the man, and one of the keys was to find amusement in his ridiculousness.

Alex bristled, back straightening and eyes getting narrow, "What the hell is this?"

Hercules sat down next to his roommate, "This," he picked up another identical flyer, "is the Selection."

"The Selection?"

Hercules nodded, "Yeah, you know, the thing where the court brings in a bunch of people for the King to find a consort or whatever they're looking for."

Alex's eyes widened, "Wait, that selection?!"

"Yes that selection, you dumbass."

Alex relaxed and turned his attention back to his laptop screen, "Huh. Why does this matter?"

Looking at his roommate's laptop screen, he was unsurprised to find that Alex was working on an essay dated for two months in the future.

"You have to sign up, we both do actually."

Still looking at Alex, he watched as his friend blinked repeatedly, before letting out a quiet, "huh."

"Yeah, the first round is mandatory for all guys in college ages twenty to twenty-five."

"What do we have to do?"

Hercules leaned back into the couch and looked at the ceiling, "We have to fill out a basic questionnaire application sort of thing, submit a couple photos, and then add something that tells them something about us. The official recommendations are essays, stories, or drawings. I think I'm just gonna submit some sketches and call it a day."

"It says here the required supplemental piece is supposed to give them a better insight into our character. It can be whatever we want it to, with the medium being up to the young man. It's not stated outright, but it's heavily implied that they'll only look at the extra piece if they like your initial application and picture."

He folded an arm over his eyes and said, "Alright, so we just gotta make our applications really boring, submit really bad pictures, and we'll never have to worry about this ever again."

Alex let out an offended sound at that, and Hercules wished he could be surprised, but Alex had never been one to do anything half-assed.

"But, Herc, if someone else gets selected from here imagine the shame! We have to be the ones to go! Besides, you know that Frederickson is positively obsessed with the King. Can you imagine how fucking great it'd be to be able to look the pompous ass in the eye and tell him you're about to go spend some private time with his Majesty? His face would be priceless!"

Hercules took in a deep breath, "Alex. it's a mandatory screening, you do know that the likelihood of one of us getting into the twelve is beyond crazy low - let alone the both of us. Besides, I'm not royal material. And, from an aesthetic viewpoint, you'd offer a much nicer contrast to ol' Georgie."

He heard the computer being set on the table, and was able to prepare himself when he suddenly found Alex sitting in his lap, and his arm being pushed away from his eyes, with his roommate's face only inches from his own.

"How dare you insult my future husband in such a manner? He isn't old, he's... distinguished."

Alex's personal boundaries were nonexistent, and he couldn't help but wonder how that'd go over in the palace.

"Whatever you say, Hammie, whatever you say."

He really wasn't surprised at all when over the next week he found Alex looking into the history of the royal family, and the political power granted to the role of consort. The living room had become a mess, full of printed out papers detailing royal protocol, etiquette, and tips and tricks meant to impress a man of high standing. The already overflowing bookshelf had somehow been stuffed with more books, the most recent additions being the stories of the people who have gone through the Selections of years passed.

“Alex, do you seriously want to become the royal consort?”

His roommate looked up from where he was fiddling with his phone, “I mean, not really? I don’t think I’m suited for the consort position. I want to actually do something with my life, Herc, and while being a royal does sound awfully cushy, you’re kind of limited. Besides, the King’s kind of boring, and what would he want with some random poor immigrant?”

“Then why are you putting so much effort into this, man?”

“I was only joking at first when I said I wanted to get in just to rub it in Frederickson’s face, but then the day after you told me about it, he was bragging about how he was going to make it to the 12 because his parents were friends with some people on the council. And of course you know I’m his favorite person to antagonize.”

Hercules settled his face in his hands, voice muffled when he said, “You didn’t.”

“I did - I told him that if I didn’t get in I’d write his essays for the rest of the semester.”

“Why would you do that?”

“He made a remark against my honor.”

“Dude, this is 2016. You’re a college student. You haven’t slept in over 48 hours, and you probably haven’t eaten in longer. You have less than twenty bucks in your bank account. What the hell did he possibly say about the honor you obviously don’t have?”

Alex chuckled, and ran a hand through his hair, “He told me I wouldn’t be able to seduce the King if we were the only two men left on earth.”

If Hercules was any closer to the wall, he’d be banging his head on it.

Of fucking course this was what it was. Alexander was his friend, but Hercules had no problem he was beyond ridiculous. He was arrogant and prideful, and of course when someone said something about his ability to seduce a man, he’d feel the need to prove them wrong. Hercules would normally be right there with him, for solidarity,

He’d been under the impression that Alex had been doing all the reading and research in order to write his supplemental essay. He was wrong, all of that had simply been what he’d wanted to do in order to get in the right mindset. Mind over matter and all that rot.

Alex was always writing something - an essay that’s not due for weeks, an anonymous letter to a local paper, a blogpost - but it was different seeing him hunched over his computer, knowing he was working on one thing. He was no doubt on his hundredth draft by now, and Alex’s first drafts are always as close to perfection as humanly possible.

Hercules leaned over Alex, placing his head on the other man’s shoulder, and said, “Dude, you know that whoever is reading these is probably going to have to read thousands of them, right? They’re not going to want to read one of your fifty page masterpieces.”

Alex didn’t look up at him, “There’s no word, page, or content limit of any kind, really.”

“That’s because they didn’t want to make it too specific - they want to look at the nudes people send in.”

He felt his roommate startle, and Hercules placed his hand on Alex’s other shoulder, cutting in

before he could say anything, “You’re not sending nudes, Alex.”

“And why not? If that’s what going to get me in. I don’t really intend on staying there you know, I just need to get there.”

“Okay, say you do send nudes, and you become one of the 12. They’re all gonna know you’re there as the sexy bimbo one. Don’t you want to get there because of who you really are? You have a brain in there - you like to brag about it often enough - use it, show it off.”

Alex leaned his head back, hitting Hercules’ face, and said, “Well, fine then. I mean, the Selection is usually just a whore-show type situation, but surely the King will be looking for actual companionship. His first wife wasn’t exactly what you’d label a pretty young thing, and they were happy together. I’ll be the brains, you’ll be brawn, and between the two of us we have enough looks to overpower anyone else who shows up.”

“Dude, even if I got chosen, I think I’d just leave.”

Alex pouted, “You’d leave me alone to the sharks to be found among the court? I’m hurt,” and raised a hand to his heart.

Hercules shook his head, and moved away, grabbing his sketchbook and tossing it in Alex’s direction before making his way to the kitchen.

“Can you look through that and help me pick what sketches to send in.”

He returned to where Alex was sitting with a sandwich and a cup of coffee to find his sketchbook full of post-it notes sticking out of the pages, and his roommate once more working on his essay.

He put the coffee next to the computer, “Thanks, man. What are you writing about, anyway?”

“Well, the first couple drafts had to do with what I would do in the position of Consort - what charities and causes I’d support, what movements and ideas I’d push - basically the more political side of things. But as I was looking into to causes, I started to look into how the monarchy might possibly be affecting the economy. At first it made sense, because the government needed to be strong to pull the country through its beginning years, but the royals have only stepped back from the governing process as time’s moved forward. I think that they should take a more active role.”

Hercules sighed, “Dude, we both know the monarchy is more symbolic than anything. The King has power, I guess, but he can’t just start making changes.”

“Actually, he could! That’s the thing! The laws regarding what the ruling leader can or can’t do haven’t really changed, they just haven’t acted on them for fear out public response!”

“And you think you’d actually be able to change that as Consort.”

Alex always got excited when he started to talk about whatever was bothering him, and this was no different, “Actually, the Consort doesn’t have the official license to do that! But, they can influence the King, and they can encourage certain causes and committees and similar things. It’s a much more subtle manipulation, but things can be achieved.”

“So, not your type of game.”

“Not really, “ Alex said, staring at his computer screen once more, “but, I don’t have to let them know that right away, now do I?”

The room was once more filled with the sound of Alex's typing, and Hercules took his sketchbook to his room to look through the drawings that had been marked.

A couple more days passed, and it was time for them to submit their applications, and of course Alex was still putting the finishing touches on his.

"Dude, you have like ten minutes before it closes."

Alex's typing got only more frantic, if possible, "I know, I know. I just have to type this one last thing."

At 11:59 pm exactly, Hercules heard Alex's shout of triumph, and let out a quick sigh of relief. He didn't know exactly what the consequences were for not turning in a submission, but he was sure it wouldn't help Alex in his goal of becoming one of the 12.

Not long after, the two were sitting on the couch, watching some cooking show. It was nice, and if Alex did end up going, Hercules had no problem enjoying the last bit of normalcy before everything started to become centered around the going ons at the palace.

"So, what did you end up writing about?"

"I scrapped most of what I wrote about political actions and what not, and instead focused on who I am as a person. I looked a bit into what the King has done, and read a lot of those personal story articles that always come out with the Selections in order to get a grasp on the public image of the King's personality. I kind of cross-referenced everything until I was pretty sure I had a solid idea of just who George Washington is, and I kind of talked about myself in a way that would flatter all of that? I didn't outright say that I'd be a good fit, and just made it seem like a personal essay sort of deal."

"Huh, how long it'd end up being?"

"Less than ten pages."

"I'm impressed."

"Thanks."

Chapter End Notes

So I know I said I would only be posting once a week until I finished "Entirely A Matter of Chance" but today's been a bit weird and all writing has been very slow-going, so I wanted to make sure I posted something today :-)

Chapter 3

The next month passed in a blur. The day the letters from the palace came, Alex was nearly bouncing in his seat.

He had made it to the next round of screening, Hercules had not. Alex would have been much more emotionally invested in Hercules' short flash of disappointment had he known that Hercules actually cared about making it to the palace.

The letter detailed exactly how the next round would take place, and what they'd need to do to prepare. Apparently a member of the council or one of their aides would be coming to personally interview him, with questions based on the submitted materials and anything else they feel like researching, completely up to the interviewer's discretion. There was little information provided, leaving much of it open to interpretation.

Alex was suddenly hit with a wave of something - this was now much more real. It was simple to joke and think about something when all you're doing is sending in a picture and an essay. But Alex had never personally met with nobility, they weren't the type of people he mingled with. The books might detail all the etiquette, but it was difficult to learn that sort of thing from a book. And Alex wouldn't be surprised if the information made available to the public was all incredibly incorrect, for the sole purpose of being able to pinpoint just who was faking it at the royal functions and other such events.

This interview was the primary obstacle right now between him and the palace, once he got there, he'd be fine. He'd be able to leave, and write something about the Selection and its effect on society, and move on with his life. Or he could stay, and capture the King.

Alex pushed those worries out mind for the time being - his interview wasn't for a couple of weeks, he could stress later - and instead looked forward to being able to shove it in George Frederickson's face that he had gotten through the round two.

If what Frederickson said about council connections was true, then he might have made it to round two as well, but knowing that Alex was competing alongside him would be enough to make him sweat.

Luckily for Alex, he had class that day with Frederickson. And when he walked into the classroom, he saw the other man already in his seat.

"Hey, Georgey, guess what?"

Frederickson made his best attempt at an intimidating sneer, but the way his pale skin twisted made his face appear more like curdled milk than anything, "What could you possibly have to tell me, Hamilton?"

Alex smiled real big, and pulled out the letter from his bag, waving it in front of his face, "Guess who made it to round two?"

There it was - Frederickson stood up, towering over Alex, face red, and said, "You couldn't have possibly made it to round two, I heard that less than 5,000 did."

Alex felt his eyes widen, and he let out a laugh, "Wait, you heard less than 5,000 made it through to the second round? Did you hear this from those council connections you were bragging about when you were saying you were sure to make it to the 12? Does this mean you didn't get chosen

for round 2?"

Frederickson's face got even redder, if possible, "How the hell did you make it through to the second round? Did you send them a sex tape? Nudes? A detailed explanation on the right way to suck a cock? You have nothing to offer besides that pretty little mouth of yours, I wouldn't be surprised if you told me you gave a demonstration."

"Wouldn't you like to know? I mean, it obviously didn't work for you."

Luckily for Alex, that was the exact moment the professor walked into the room, saving him from what was looking like it might have turned into a physical altercation.

The days passed by rather quickly, and Alex made sure to annoy Frederickson from a safe distance.

Too soon, the day of his interview arrived, and the morning was spent preparing himself, mentally and physically.

His interviewer was coming to the University, and would be happen in an office so gracefully offered to be used for this occasion.

It probably wasn't the best idea to have chugged a large coffee beforehand, because Alex's hand was shaking slightly from the combination of nerves and caffeine. He had prepared for this. He had spent hours looking into all sorts of questions that could be asked, and cross-referenced all the sources from the previous selections. There wasn't anything more he could have possibly done, and even if there was, it wouldn't have helped. He could answer every single question exactly as whoever was interviewing him wanted him to, and still not be brought on.

Only 12 made it through, and no one ever knew exactly what it was the court was looking for.

When Alex opened the door, he was greeted with the sight of a very large man holding a very small dog.

The man smiled, and gestured for Alex to come in, "Sit down, sit down - you must be Alexander. I've been looking forward to meeting you."

There was something dangerous about the man. Overall, there was nothing threatening about him. His face seemed open, his smile wide, and his overall way of carrying himself almost humorous - but there was a shrewdness to his eyes that Alex couldn't find it in himself to ignore. One mistake that almost everyone turned away from the Selections seemed to have made was believing and accepting the kindnesses offered to them by the nobles.

Alex smiled - a particular smile that was polite, not overly wide, and very practiced - and shook the hand of the man before sitting down, "Hello! It's an honor, sir, but please, call me Alex."

The man laughed and held the dog closer to his chest and said, "Of course, Alex - but I insist that you must call me Friedrich. Von Steuben is such a mouthful, and I do get ever so tired of hearing Baron thrown around everywhere - you can never be quite sure who it's directed at."

Alex nodded and watched as the baron placed the dog in his lap and clapped his hands together, "Now, I'm afraid I must actually interview you. Tell me, why did you apply?"

Alex folded his hands in his lap and said, "Well, sir, I applied because the first round was mandatory, though I'm sure that's not what you're asking."

Von Steuben chuckled, "You are correct. You see, because the first round was mandatory, we had

to look through a truly horrendous amount of applications. Now, I'll admit that I enjoyed flipping through some of the pictures, but really the names and descriptions all start to run into each other after a while. The thing is, that after you look through a couple dozen, it becomes quite simple to see who actually put effort into the thing, and who just slapped something together last minute for fear of the consequences."

Alex nodded again, "I imagine, sir."

"Your application struck me as quite curious."

"How so?"

Von Steuben took a moment or two to reply, taking the time to pet the dog and think, "Well, to begin with, I didn't see every single application, only the ones my aides sent forward to me. Most of the ones that make it through the process have ties with the noble families. There are of course those who do seem to be genuine fits, but we have to soothe the feathers of our peers and assure them that their children didn't get pushed away immediately, I'm sure you understand. Your background stood out due to your lack of connections. I set it aside so that I'd actually read through it."

The baron had obviously looked at it, considering where they were, but Alex didn't say anything.

"Yours was the last application I read, as I had forgotten about it, to be honest. But I do believe that my forgetfulness was just Lady Fate's way of keeping the best for last. Not only did your background provide some insight into your character, but your pretty face and obvious intelligence made something very clear to me."

Alex was obviously expected to prod the man for the answer, considering Von Steuben's pointed look, "And what was that, if you don't mind me asking, sir?"

The baron smiled, less practiced this time, obviously pleased that Alex was playing along.

"I'll have you know that I consider the King to be a very close friend of mine - one of the very few men I'd consider an actual friend, and not just someone I must be friends with, and I'm sure you understand the difference. George doesn't want this selection, but it was forced upon him by the council that I'm a part of. I know the type of boys that the others will push forward, and while they might seem perfectly promising at first, they don't know George like I do."

It was bizarre to know that the George Von Steuben was so casually referring to was both the King of the country, and the man he was currently being interviewed to possibly meet.

The baron continued on, "I have a pretty clear picture of what the final 12 are going to look like, and you're going to be a part of it."

Alex's jaw dropped, "What?"

Von Steuben's smile grew wider, "Yes. You, my boy, are going to part of the 12 if I have anything to do with it, and I do, have something to do with it that is. I read your paper, and beyond your obvious skill with the pen, there was something there. You're smart, that's undeniable, but you know that. You have potential, and you see things. George is a very private King, and somehow you managed to figure out what he really is. I don't know how you did it, as nothing I've read has managed to accurately describe him. But the thing is, you didn't mention the King at all in your paper."

"No, I did not."

“You talked about yourself.”

Alex nodded.

“You, Alexander Hamilton, managed to tell a story about yourself and in doing so conveyed to me that you know the King better than you have any right to.”

“I don’t know anything about the King.”

Von Steuben smiled, and relaxed into his chair. Alex find himself doing the exact opposite, and he wouldn’t at all be surprised if he later discovered he had cut off his circulation by squeezing his hands together so hard.

“No, you don’t. But you could, there was something in how you wrote that told me you could meet his Majesty, and look right through him. No one can do that, and that is why you are going to be absolutely perfect for George Washington.”

Alex was suitably shocked.

There were no questions being asked here. The baron was informing Alex that not only would he be making it into the 12, but at this point in the other man’s perspective, he’d be the winner.

“Sir, Friedrich, how could I possibly be perfect for the King? I’ve never even met him. You said earlier that you know I’m not stupid, so it shouldn’t be a surprise when I say that I’m perfectly aware that the Selection isn’t meant to result in some love match. Despite what stories might be released to the media, the one that’s ultimately chosen always represents some political benefit to the royal family - be it a tighter connection with the nobles, or attempting to show the country and the world that racism in America is over.”

“But didn’t I say that George didn’t want a Selection?”

Alex nodded.

The baron continued, “He hates them, for exactly that reason. He says they’re nothing more than a way to sample the finest whores, and then choose your favorite. But you’re right, the choices are always political in nature - in the palace, everything is political in nature. George is expecting to send every single one of the 12 home, Alexander. I promised him a love match.”

He took in a deep breath, and focused on relaxing his hands, “A love match. You promised him a love match. And you think that love match is me.”

“Correct on all accounts.”

“You can’t control that sort of thing.”

Von Steuben laughed, “No, we cannot. But you’re what I can do. I know George. I know his type, and you’re exactly it. You’re beautiful, delicate, with a fire burning in your eyes. I don’t think you could hide your brain if you tried, not that you ever should. But beyond that, that same fire promises a bite, and a willingness to fight back - and that’s exactly what George needs. He’ll be intrigued by you, because he’ll see that spark, and once you show your passion and that bite, he won’t be able to help himself.”

This interview was not going at all like Alex expected. He had thought that there would be questions, and then he’d be sent on his merry way. If the baron was right, nothing in his life would ever be the same.

Alex nodded once, but this time he did not remain silent, “So, if you’re right, there is a very high chance that not only will I make it to the 12, but I will be chosen by the king. You’re confident in this, even though you ultimately have no control over that. What if I told you that I don’t want to go? What if I said that I entered because I had to, and maybe only tried so I could rub it in the others’ faces when I got through to the second round.”

The dog’s eyes were dark and beady, and its entire head was smaller than the hand currently running down its back. Alex focused on the dog, waiting for the baron to say something.

“Part of me believes that, I’ll admit. You do seem like the type of person that would do something for the sole purpose of proving someone wrong. I’ve researched you and looked into you, Alex. You’re hungry, and there’s a lot you want out of your life. We both know that there aren’t many places that are better than the palace to form connections, and the Selection itself will get your name out there, and your voice heard. You could get all the way to the final round, with the King on his knee before you, and all you’d have to do is say no and you’d be able to leave. You’d be the first chosen to reject the King, and I really don’t want to see George’s heart broken, but ultimately that choice is up to you.”

“Fine.”

“Fine? Just fine?”

Alex nodded, and shook the hand that was stretched over the desk.

“Well, Alexander. Expect to be hearing from me soon.”

“I look forward to it, Friedrich.”

And then Alexander walked out of the office, millions of thoughts racing through his mind.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I would like to take a quick moment to thank Irene (iwritelikeimrunningoutoftime) for reading over this and just being an overall great person <3

The Baron Von Steuben walked into the council chamber with a single folder in his hands, and three of his young aides trailing behind him.

Most of the other men were already seated, and were chatting among themselves, flipping through the papers in stacks before them. They had all cleared the entire day for this, knowing that deciding on the 12 was no small thing.

Not long after the baron sat down did Lord Adams clear his throat and start the meeting.

“We have a very important task set before us today - deciding upon the 12 who we will invite to the palace for The Selection. There are ten of us, as such, we will each bring in one of those included in the files we’ve brought in today, and the last two shall be decided upon from the remaining files as a group. We must keep in mind that our King is looking for an actual match - someone who will be a full companion to him, and not just a bedwarmer. I am fully aware that each of you have your own agendas, and we must work within those, and set aside others, in order to achieve our goal.”

The men all nodded in agreement, and Adams turned towards Nathanael Greene and said, “Lord Greene, would you like the honor of presenting the first candidate?”

Greene graciously nodded his head, and pulled the top file from the stack in front of him, “There were a couple of young men I interviewed who I believe would be suitable, however I do believe that young William Grayson would be my first choice.”

He handed the file to the man next to him, and it circulated the group, each flipping through the provided images and text, and forming their opinion.

When the file made its way to Friedrich, he found that it showed a rather handsome boy, from a wealthy and privileged family. His resume detailed either his intelligence and drive, or his daddy’s money buying him internships and opportunities. Nothing he had done seemed particularly outstanding - the boy was malleable. Grayson was exactly the type that he suspected all the men would be submitting for approval. Grayson was the type that George could tolerate, but not the type that George could love or respect.

Von Steuben remained silent as he passed the file to his left.

Adams handed the file back to Greene, “Now that we’ve all looked at young Mr. Grayson, what are your opinions?”

Friedrich wanted to raise a complaint, but it would be of no use. He couldn’t reject every single person submitted on that basis that he knew the king best. The other council members didn’t care what the King wanted, really. They all had their own goals, and each man here wanted the boy

they submitted to win. They'd all get their candidates to trust them, and if their candidate was chosen, they'd have a line directly to the King's intimate life.

Unknown to the boy, he had gone around and talked with Hamilton's teachers and friends before the interview - trying to figure out exactly the type of person he was. One could make a few guesses at the thoughts behind actions detailed on paper, but one would never know for certain. From what the baron had gathered, Hamilton wasn't the type to take things lying down, and even if he had managed to make himself into the brightest star in Hamilton's life - he sincerely doubted he'd get a single detail about anything the King did or said. That was the type of boy George needed, and the opposite of the type of the boy the others wanted.

And so the Baron Von Steuben didn't voice any of his thoughts, as the other men commented on the handsome couple the boy and the king would make were he chosen.

Most of the candidates were too similar to Friedrich to care to distinguish between them. There were a couple of outliers - Tench Tilghman didn't come from a wealthy background, and Benedict Arnold wasn't the delicate, pretty young thing that the others were.

So far, the only real challenge for Alexander would be Philip Schuyler's boy - a young man by the name of Benjamin Tallmadge. He was beautiful, intelligent, hardworking, determined, and not one to take something lying down. The main difference between Benjamin and Alexander, which Von Steuben would figure out after some more inquiries, was that Benjamin was more willing to go behind your back and act more subtly to get what he wanted, whereas Alexander was far from delicate in his actions.

The council took a break before the baron could present Alexander, and while the other men gathered together to discuss possible future actions based on the revealed choices and summoned servants to bring them a bite to eat, Von Steuben instead went to the King's study.

He was announced by a servant, and led into the room. George was sitting behind his desk, staring at a pile of papers he was expected to read before making an appearance at some sort of event.

The other man seemed grateful for the interruption, and leaned back into his chair when the baron took his own seat.

"So, what can I do for you?"

"In this case, your Majesty, I do believe it is what I can do for you."

The King let the smallest hint of a smile cross his features, "Oh, really? So what is it you have for me?"

"Well, I'm sure you're aware that the council is meeting today."

"I had assumed it had something to do with the Selection, since it is one of those few official meetings I am not required to also attend."

Only a stupid King would believe his men weren't constantly conspiring against him, and Friedrich was proud to serve a King that was decidedly not stupid.

"It does indeed have something to do with the Selection."

The two men stared at one another, passing the time observing and reflecting on their thoughts. The King broke the silence, "Are you going to tell me what exactly it has to do with the Selection, or are you just taunting me? This is my future, you know. And you were the one who insisted on

finding my a love match, if such a thing is possible.”

Friedrich nodded, “I wanted to see how long it would take you to bit the bait.”

The King snorted, “Lovely. Now, what is this particular meeting focusing on?”

“Why, the 12, of course.”

George folded his hands together, and rested them on his lap. His overall appearance was relaxed, but if one knew where to look, it was easy to see that the King’s mind was whirring.

“Of course. Any updates? Trends worth noticing? What am I to expect out of the young bodies that are to be paraded before me?”

Von Steuben laughed, and said, “We are just half-way through the council submitting their first choices, and once we’re done, we’ll have ten. After, we’ll choose the final two. There hasn’t yet been any real disagreements over the choices. I’m not sure if that’s because they’re all acceptable, or if the council as a whole has decided that each man gets to submit one young man unopposed.”

George moved his hands from his lap to the desk, and nodded his head, “I see. What are your thoughts on the men thus far?”

“Oh, they’re all very beautiful. None of the is obviously lacking in intelligence, judging from the applications and notes of whoever has brought them forward. Some seem to be a bit stubborn, others more artistic. They’re all beautiful, in their own way. Overall, their personalities seem a bit mild. I’m not sure if that’s because of who they are as people, or simply who they’ve portrayed themselves to be. No one is giving the full list of reasons why they’re recommending the boys they are.”

“There is always so much left unsaid in these matters.”

“It is a political matter, after all. I’d be disappointed in the men if they treated it as anything else.”

“Are you treating it as a political matter?”

“Me not treating it as a political matter is me making a political statement, isn’t it amazing how these things work out?”

George chuckled, “It truly is. I often wonder what my life would be life if I had been born a farmer or a businessman instead of a king.”

“The world will never know, your Majesty.”

“No, I suppose you’re right. It is useless to ponder such things.”

He checked his watch, and saw that the break was almost over.

“Sometimes, I find that escaping into your daydreams can be the only way to stay sane, your Majesty. Unfortunately, I’m afraid that I must return to the council chambers, stuffy place that they are. We have the rest of your 12 to select, after all.”

“Of course.”

Von Steuben left the King’s study, and made it back just in time to hear Lord Sullivan start to introduce his candidate - Edmund Randolph, another young man from an influential family. When he opened the folder, he was surprised to find a rather plain face staring back at him. He wasn’t

unattractive, but compared to the rest of the boys, he would be. He didn't bother to read the essay the boy had submitted.

The file made its round, and when it came time for comments to be and no one made a complaint, it was the baron's turn.

"I want to bring in Alexander Hamilton. He goes to Columbia, smart, pretty, and from my conversations with him I do believe he'd have caught our King's attention were they ever to encounter one another in a more casual setting."

He handed the folder over, and prayed that people would give it the same lack of attention they had the others. Alexander was coming to the palace if Von Steuben had to drag him there kicking and screaming himself, but it would be much simpler if his presence was accepted by all.

Morgan and Stirling didn't spend too much time looking at it - seeing the picture and the University, and sorting him into the same box as the others. Adams, of course, had to give it more attention.

"Baron, this boy wasn't even born in America, we can't bring him into the palace, let alone give him a crown and title if he were to win."

Von Steuben sighed, "Lord Adams, with all due respect, I understand your concern but if you were to actually look at the page, you'd see that he was born in the U.S. Virgin Isles, which for purposes of marrying into the royal family, is considered to be America."

Mutterings made their way around the table. This was exactly what he had been hoping to avoid, but hopefully he'd actually be able to get these men to see sense. It was Lord Schuyler who rose to the occasion, "Lord Adams, the Baron is right - he's a citizen of this fine country, and more than that, he attends one of our most prestigious institutions. He fits in among the lot rather nicely based on that information, I find."

He had always liked Lord Schuyler, but today he was feeling particularly fond of the man. Perhaps he'd invite him to lunch, there were always things to discuss, and the Schuyler family was a good connection to have.

Greene pried the file from Adams' hands to get a look at it for himself, and after a brief moment passed it on.

After it made it back into Von Steuben's hands, he felt a sense of satisfaction rise up within him. Alexander Hamilton would be coming to the palace as one of the 12.

Morgan presented James Madison, and Stirling a young man by the name of Samuel Seabury. Von Steuben didn't have very high hopes for either of them. They both seemed small, frail, and while their writings had a certain quality about them, the interview notes detailed quiet young men who weren't quite strong enough in their opinions and beliefs to have a place at the palace. They'd be among the first George sent away.

And then it was Lord Adams' turn. The boy he brought forward was from a wealthy family, who had returned from a study abroad in France just in time to be able to enter his application. His name was Thomas Jefferson, an intelligent boy from an influential family in Virginia.

Nothing about it was out of the ordinary until Friedrich's eyes landed on the photograph, "Adams, you cannot be serious."

Nine pairs of eyes turned to him, but it was the addressed man who replied, "What ever do you

mean?"

"I mean that Thomas Jefferson is identical to our Lafayette. You cannot possibly believe that the King is going to wish to court some who looks exactly like a boy he considers to be his son."

Morgan nearly ripped the folder from his hands in order to look at the picture, "Dear lord, Steuben is right. If I didn't know any better, I would tell you that I was staring at a picture of Lafayette. Adams, you're mad, the King isn't going to consider the boy. Even if he was a perfect match, his Majesty cannot publicly marry his adopted son's twin. There'd be an outrage, and the gossips would go crazy!"

Adams' face went red and blotchy, "Jefferson might look similar to Lafayette, yes, but that's not a good enough reason to turn the boy away! He's a genius! He'd be an asset to the royal family. Besides, everyone here knows that Lafayette is a handsome young man, so at least we know that Thomas isn't hideous by any stretch of the word."

The man stared at the rest of the council, daring them to say a word. No one spoke, but there were several shared looks that made their way around the room.

Ten young men had been chosen, the names written down, and letter being prepared to be sent out by their aids. Each man had made their decision - be it which connection they wished to strengthen, or out of a wish of a chance of genuine happiness for their king.

Those who had brought multiple files with them started to pass those around the room, and the next hours were spent in deliberation over what two other men would be chosen.

The candidates were all beautiful, intelligent, and after some files were thrown away, only those from influential backgrounds remained.

Von Steuben wanted nothing more than to pick two randomly and call it a day.

Much later than their usual work days, the council was finally dismissed. The final two candidates were to be John Laurens and Aaron Burr.

Chapter 5

It was easy to forget about the Selection. The hype had died down since notifications for who went past the first round were sent out. After all, no one really cared once it was obvious they weren't the winner.

Alexander was working on a blog post when Hercules walked into the apartment and threw his pile of mail at him.

An odd feeling filled his chest when he saw an envelope with the royal seal on it. The last time he had received one of these had been when he was told he had moved onto the first round. The losers were never informed, so that existence of the letter could only mean one thing.

"Hey, Hercules, did you go through my mail?"

Hercules gave him a confused look before turning back to his phone and saying, "No, why would I?"

Alex stood up and walked over to sit on the couch next to his roommate, "Because I think I made it to the 12."

The letter was ripped out of his hands. "Wait, really? That's fantastic - I mean, that is what you wanted, right?"

"I guess? I mean, there's a certain satisfaction in knowing I got through, but also this means that I have to decide if I actually want to try and become Consort, or if I try to get sent back and return to my own life."

"Dude, even if you're the first one to leave, you'll still always be someone who was in the Selection."

Alex leaned forward and rested his head in his hands, "I know! This is so bizarre."

"You are going though, right?"

He sat up quickly, "Of course I am! Are you trying to get rid of me?"

Hercules' hand made its way to his shoulder, "Nah, man. I'm gonna miss you. But, you know, it's an opportunity. You were the one who was talking about all the connections you'd make, this is your chance! And I mean, you're going to meet the King, He's going to know your name and your face - what better connection is there? He's always described as an honorable man. He'd probably do you a favor or two out of guilt for kicking you out."

"Herc, I appreciate it, but he's the King - I don't think he's allowed to feel guilt for that sort of thing."

His roommate shrugged, "It's worth a shot, right?"

Alex looked down at the still unopened envelope in his hands, "I guess."

"You should probably open that."

"Probably."

Alex tore the envelope, and pulled out a piece of paper telling him that he had been chosen to be one of the 12, and that councilmember Baron Von Steuben would be arriving in two weeks' time to personally escort him to the palace.

"Well, Hercules my man, you have two weeks left to deal with me, and then I am leaving you for an unspecified period of time, possibly forever, to live my days surrounded by luxury and people in positions of power."

Hercules laughed and said, "Sounds like you'll be living out your dream."

It was easy for Alex to put things out of his mind when professors were assigning essays and clubs had meetings to manage and people were being wrong on the internet. It really wasn't a surprise that he didn't make that big of a deal out of the fact that his entire life was going to be changing in a way most people only dreamed of.

He grabbed two suitcases, and left them open on his bedroom floor, occasionally dropping something in there when he realized he wouldn't need it before he left. Other than that, there was no sign he was leaving.

Or rather, there was no sign until a particularly flamboyant man trailed by aides walked into his lecture one day.

The baron was meant to arrive at 5 that evening, but of course he deemed it necessary to show up four hours early.

Von Steuben was a large man, with the voice and attitude to match his stature, "Alexander Hamilton, are you here? I can't see you, but you are rather small, so that's really not a surprise."

There was a part of Alexander that was grateful for the ridiculousness. After all, he certainly had no intention of making a production of his leaving, and this way he got to see the expression of disbelief cross George Frederickson's face when the other man realized what exactly the baron's presence meant.

He grabbed his computer, shoved it in his bag, and met the baron in the front of the room, "Hello Friedrich, you are rather early, I'm afraid I'm entirely unprepared."

The baron laughed, made a gesture that had one of the aides removing Alex's bag from his shoulders, and said, "That is no problem at all, my boy. We'll simply have more time to chat. I'm sure you have your goodbyes to make before you leave. After all, this might very well be the last time you're here!"

Alex nodded, and turned to his professor who was standing still with a disgruntled expression on his face, "Sorry sir, I thought I was leaving after class."

Von Steuben laughed again, and Alex followed him when the man turned to leave, waving at his shocked classmates as the door shut behind him.

"So, Alexander, are you packed? I can have my boys grab your stuff before we make the rounds."

"For the most part, I just have to put a couple last minute things away. Is there anything I need specifically? We weren't really told anything."

The baron shook his head, "No. Everything will actually be provided, so that the selected are on more equal footing throughout the process. The instructions are left vague on purpose, so those involved in deciding who stays and goes can form their own judgements on that sort of thing."

“I thought it was the King who decided that.”

Von Steuben waved his hand through the air in a noncommittal motion, “Technically, yes. Though everyone will be whispering in the King’s ear, and based on what I know of George, he most likely is going to be gathering reports from everyone in the beginning. Ultimately, his decision will be solely his own, but he does like to consider multiple viewpoints.”

“I see.”

“You will.”

They piled into the town car the baron had arrived in, and made their way to Alex’s apartment. The man and his aides were obviously underwhelmed once they walked inside, but Alex couldn’t bring himself to care. He was a broke college student with a hell of a scholarship, they couldn’t possibly expect much more from him.

Hercules had managed to work it so that he only had to be on campus until noon so he’d be there to see Alex off, and was startled when he looked up from his sketchbook to find a surprising amount of people in his living room.

He took off his headphones and stood, “Alex! I guess you’re leaving soon, “ Hercules turned toward von Steuben and his aides, “Um, to be honest sir, I’m not sure how to address you, but hello and welcome to our humble abode.”

The baron and his aides laughed, and Hercules’ hand went to rub the back of his neck, but he was stopped when one of the young men placed his hand on Hercules’ shoulder and said, “Ah, do not worry, your honesty and manner is refreshing.”

Hercules smiled at the aide who had yet to name himself, but couldn’t respond because he soon found his roommate’s face crushed into his broad chest.

“Hercules, I’m gonna miss you.”

Alex felt strong arms wrap around him, and heard Von Steuben chuckling, but did his best to focus on his friend who he’d possibly not be seeing again for a very long time.

“Alex, it’s fine. I’m sure you’ll find a way to stay in touch, even if you have to keep me waiting for your handwritten letters like some poor army wife.”

“I’d be honored to be your husband, but I suppose that’d be ill-manners considering I’m going to fighting for the attention of another man.”

Hercules laughed and squeezed Alex tighter before letting go, the others in the room chuckling along.

“C’mon man, let’s get your stuff together.”

They walked into Alex’s room that he’d been slowly cleaning up. He heard Von Steuben’s voice call, “Pierre, be a dear, and help Alex with his things, will you?”

The main aide walked into the room, and was visibly shocked at the two half-empty suitcases, “Alexander, is this really all you have?”

Alex looked up sheepishly, “Yeah, sorry, never been much of a clothes-horse.”

That was a lie, but he didn't exactly have a desire to explain that the clothing he actually liked was beyond his budget.

Pierre sneered, "Apparently not."

He zipped the bags closed after seeing Alex nod, and carried them into the living room, with Alex and Hercules trailing behind.

The baron was also shocked when he looked down at the sound of the bags being set down and saw only the two, but seeing Alex's glare, made no comment.

Pierre and the other aides left the apartment, leaving Alex and Hercules alone with the baron. Alex soon found himself being crushed to his friend's chest again, and a face being pressed into his hair, "Alex, man, I'm gonna miss you. You're gonna do great. I know that you're not really supposed to use your phone or anything, but you can write, so dude, you better be sending me so many letters. I'll even try to make my handwriting legible for you, because I'm nice like that. Come back soon, but not too soon, you gotta win this shit man, it's a matter of pride at this point, for your honor."

Alex squeezed back as tightly as he could, before pulling away and following von Steuben out of his own apartment before he could realize that he didn't really want to go at all.

This time, instead of everyone being in one car, they were split up - with Alex and Von Steuben in one and the aides in another.

The two men sat in silence, and Alex could feel the baron's eyes drilling deep within him. The other man knew everything he could, no doubt, and that was unnerving. Alex knew that he was going to have to get used to feeling uncomfortable. His competition would be made up of people who had spent nearly as much time in the palace as they had out of it, and the etiquette and social graces would come naturally to them - whereas Alex would constantly have to work at it.

He couldn't let that intimidate him. He didn't let those feelings get to him when he first stepped foot onto Columbia's campus, and he couldn't let them get to him now. Alex had to take that fear and trepidation and funnel it inside of him, and use it as motivation to spur him forward.

He'd always been determined, and this would be no different.

Friedrich ruined his introspection when he said, "Now, we have a very long drive ahead of us, and there won't be many opportunities, if any, for us to speak in private once we arrive at the palace."

Alex nodded, "Let's get to it, then."

"First thing, our King has made it so he knows nothing about the candidates before they arrive. There may of course be a few faces he recognizes, but George intends to form his own opinions of you all as individuals based on his personal experiences with the 12."

Just that information alone gave the impression of an overall more honest Selection than those described in memoirs and documentaries, and Alex found himself intrigued.

"Does that put me at a disadvantage, or does it work in my favor?"

"Well, you certainly won't have your mysterious origins working in your favor, you're going to have to create the intellectual draw all on your own, which I don't think you'll have that much of a problem with."

Alex continued to stare out of the window as he said, "You mentioned in my interview you believe

the King and I are well-suited.”

Von Steuben snorted, “As well-suited as any man can be judged to be after reading a file and talking to for a short period of time. But you’re used to that sort of thing, aren’t you? Having to define yourself?”

“I suppose I am, yes.”

“The others are not. They’ve had names and riches to rely on their entire lives. Of course, they know that the King won’t be fawning over their influence, but it will be a sort of culture shock nonetheless.”

Alex looked up at that, surprised, “Are they really expecting to get through this entire thing on reputation alone?”

The baron shook his head, “I don’t believe they’re that ignorant, but unconsciously they might be. But on that note, just because the King has chosen not to know about the candidates doesn’t mean that the candidates don’t get to know about each other.”

He felt his back straighten as he focused on what the other man was saying, “I’m listening.”

Von Steuben smirked, “I’d hope so. Many of the others all run in the same circles, so you’re going to be one of the wildcards, and they’re not going to like that.”

“Nothing I’m not used to.”

Von Steuben chuckled and said, “Alright, so first on the list is John Laurens. He’s the son of a wealthy lord from South Carolina, and he was one of the two that the council decided on together, so he has no specific backer. He has the name and the status, but his views aren’t in line with most of the aristocracy’s - far too liberal. I wouldn’t be surprised if the two of you ended up getting along rather well.”

Alex wasn’t so sure he’d believed he’d get along with any of the other candidates, but there was no harm in letting an old man hope, so he simply nodded.

“Okay, so next is Thomas Jefferson, another wealthy heir, but this time from Virginia. The Washingtons were from Virginia when it was still a colony, so don’t be surprised if he somehow thinks that will win him favor. He might seem intimidating, but I’ve met the kid - he’s intelligent, but cocky. He’s Lord Adams’ candidate, who made the decision based on connections, I believe. Adams isn’t worth the hair on his head, but for some reason he holds some powerful positions, so beware. Jefferson might get pretty far in, but don’t worry, he’s identical to the King’s ward, Lafayette, and George won’t let his adopted son’s doppelganger into his bed.”

Alex couldn’t help it, “Wait, this Adams person actually thought the King would want to fuck someone who looks like his adopted son.”

Friedrich gave him a look he could tell was meant to discourage him, but his tone was far from cold, “I wouldn’t be so crude about it, but yes, apparently he did. Or rather, he believed his connection with the Jefferson valuable enough to ignore common sense.”

“Adams isn’t very smart, is he?”

The other man shook his head, “No. Now, moving on. Madison is a quiet boy from another wealthy Virginian family, and John Trumbull is fairly unremarkable except for the fact that he’s a bit of an artist. George appreciates art, don’t get me wrong, but finds much more value in the

written word. Aaron Burr is the other young man we decided upon on as a council. He goes to Princeton, and will be addressed as Lord Burr, as he was orphaned at a young age.”

“And the others?”

“Tench Tilghman, Benjamin Tallmadge, Samuel Seabury, Benedict Arnold, Edmund Randolph, and William Grayson. Arnold is more handsome than pretty, and while if he’s particularly interesting he might last a while, the King has a type, and Arnold isn’t it. They all kind of blend together, if I’m being perfectly frank. The only real competition I see for you is Tallmadge.”

Well, Alex was certainly going to keep an eye out for Jefferson, no matter how much the baron believed he wasn’t worth worrying about, but it was comforting to know that supposedly there wouldn’t be much real competition to worry about.

It was with a questioning brow raised that he asked, “Tallmadge?”

Von Steuben nodded rather quickly, “Yes. Beautiful boy, intelligent, and not from a noble background. He has a bite that’s similar to your own; he’s another one that I would have chosen for George myself. He goes to Yale, and made it there on his own merit, much like you did with Columbia. He was presented by Lord Schuyler, who is also more of a friend to the King than advisor, so it really is no surprise his candidate is so suitable.”

Alex nodded, and when the baron didn’t say anything, he felt himself start to drift off with his head against the window.

A couple hours later, he awake to a hand shaking his shoulder, and Von Steuben saying, “Alright Alex, we’re almost at the palace. When we get there, you’re going to be escorted off by the staff, and probably shown to your rooms. We will not get the chance to meet up properly. I’ll be supporting you to the best of my ability, but do not count on me to be there. The others will be set against you, just as they’re set against each other. This is between the council members as much as it is between the candidates. I wish you luck, but I truly do believe that once you have the chance to introduce yourself to George, you’ll be safe from being sent home.”

Alex said nothing, but his mind was whirring.

This was it. He had known what was going to happen in a vague sense, but it seemed that it was just now settling in. They’d arrive at the palace, and he’d be whisked away and from that moment forward his life would change. Privacy was going to become a foreign concept, and he’d have to learn to trust no one.

Alex still wasn’t completely sure he wanted to make it all the way through, but even now he could feel his competitive streak taking hold.

When his door was opened by a young man in the uniform of a royal servant opened the door, and held out a hand to help him out of the car, Alex realized that he was going to have to make that decision sooner rather than later.

Chapter 6

Von Steuben leaves him, and Alex is left following the same young man who had opened the car door, with a few others trailing behind him with his luggage.

The room he is shown to is at least twice the size of his bedroom at the apartment he shared with Hercules, and is elegantly decorated. Alex had the feeling that it was smaller and simpler than what the others might be used to, but it was the finest room he had ever been able to claim as his own.

He unpacks his books and such, but leaves most of his clothing in the luggage and shoves the bags into the closet.

There is little to do, and even if Alex wanted to use his phone, it had been taken from him by one of the staff shortly after he had arrived. There was still a sense of secrecy and formality to be had in these ceremonies, after all.

He sits in his bed, and stares at his reflection in the mirror with the heavy gilded frame. He thinks about taking his hair from its ponytail, but realizes he doesn't have a way to take out the bump that has no doubt formed by this time.

Alex isn't given much time alone with his thoughts, because the servants from before are soon knocking at his door. No words are exchanged, and Alex follows them down the unfamiliar halls until he is shown a set of doors with a guards on either side.

The doors are opened, and he sees a well-lit room with couches and chairs along the perimeter, and glass doors leading out into a garden along the one wall.

There are already young men scattered throughout the room, and all of them look up when he enters. Alex notices the judgemental looks thrown his way, and sees how they've presented himself and is fully aware of the fact that he doesn't measure up. They all very obviously donned finer clothing and took time with their appearance.

Part of him was suddenly a bit self-conscious at the moment, but he also knew that they'd all go through rounds of spa treatments and their clothing would be chosen for them on the occasions they met with the king. What he looked like now would only give the others reason to underestimate him, and that was something he could use in his favor.

He sat down on a sofa opposite a set of doors leading out to the garden. Alex looked around the room, and saw that no one was close enough to hold any sort of conversation. There were four others with him, all beautiful and well-dressed. There was one in-particular that seemed to radiate a sense of false superiority, but Alex's attention was soon brought to the opening doors.

The young man who walked in was short, covered in freckles, and dark curly hair pulled back from his face. There was a determined set to his shoulders, and on his face was the practiced pleasantly neutral expression all children raised in money and politics knew. A couple of the others nodded in the man's direction, but Alex was surprised the newcomer joined him on his sofa, rather than claiming one of the empty ones.

The man turned and faced him, "Hi! I'm John Laurens!"

"Alexander Hamilton."

The now named John Laurens looked around the rooms a couple of times, "Well, Alex, I guess

we're both here for the Selection. What do you think about the entire thing?"

A large part of him was yelling at him to stand up and tell everyone he thought the entire system was bullshit and that he was only there because he was too prideful to say he didn't want to try and win, but instead he said, "I don't really know, but I'm here, so that's a thing. What about you?"

A spark seemed to light up in John's hazel eyes, "I don't really like the institution of it, and how it favors those who already occupy positions high enough to live comfortably and make a difference without the title of consort or queen or prince or whatever they're going for. But, the publicity certainly doesn't hurt. I know I'm only here because of my dad, and that bites a little, but I'm used to that. Besides, from what I know of the King, he's not too shabby."

"Not too shabby?"

John chuckled, a lovely sound, and said, "No, not too shabby. He has worked within the constraints created by the council and the people's expectations a little bit, but he fights for what he believes in. He's awfully private for such a public figure, and I find myself intrigued. Now, I don't really think I'm meant to be the consort, if I'm being perfectly honest, but I wouldn't mind having the King as a figure to personally admire."

Alex nodded. There was something within John Laurens that appealed to him - something that told him that the potential for friendship was there, and had they met in another setting, the potential for more than friendship was also there.

The two men sat on that sofa and talked about everything and nothing, watching as the other candidates trickled in. By the time all 12 had arrived, the man Alex had noticed before was holding some sort of court.

Most of the candidates have grouped off among themselves just by how the sofas were arranged in the room. The group in the corner was the only one that seemed to have a real sense of hierarchy, and Alex didn't like it.

Everyone in this room was intelligent, beautiful, and most likely from an influential background. Alex saw a broader man, and guessed him to be Benedict Arnold. He looked rather uncomfortable talking with a quiet-mannered redhead who had the misfortune of sharing furniture with him.

John and Alex sat back and watched the others, but then John said, "So, what do you think of everyone so far?"

"Well, I don't really know. I don't recognize anyone, so they're all new to me. You probably do, from what I know about how the aristocracy lives their lives. I want to figure out which one is Benjamin Tallmadge, as from what I was told about him, I think we'd get along."

John nodded, "Yeah, I do recognize most people here, and they recognize me. It's weird to think that these are the people I grew up with for the most part and yet here we are, acting like total strangers, all because we're competing for another title none of us need."

Before Alex could respond, a man cleared his throat, and when he looked up he found a tall, brown-haired person looking slightly flustered, "Uh, hi. I'm Benjamin Tallmadge, I think you mentioned me earlier."

Alex felt his eyebrows raise as he took the other man in; beautiful was an understatement. If this was his main competition according to Von Steuben, he was going to have to step it up in the grooming department.

“Hello. I’m Alexander Hamilton - call me Alex. And yeah, I did mention you - not weird or anything, I promise.”

Benjamin wore a look of disbelief as he said, “Right. Well Alex, call me Ben. You mind if I take a seat?”

“Not at all,” Alex scooted closer to John to make room.

John reached his hand over Alex for Ben to shake and said, “I’m John Laurens.”

Their discussion continued, never straying into any area requiring real thought, but reaching a silent agreement for the time being. All three men noticed the looks being thrown their way by the man holding court in the corner, but none of them made a comment on the nature of the looks.

Instead, the topic was brought up in a much more innocent manner by Ben, “Hey, John, do you know who that is? In the corner? With the hair?”

John laughed, “Oh, him? That’s Thomas Jefferson. Both of our families are in the southern court so we’re familiar with each other. He’s smart, but a bit of a show boat. He’s been bragging about being Chosen since the letters inviting us to the second round were sent out.”

There were several things Alex could have said, but was unable to because in that moment the servants came in and handed them all a literal silver platter with a meal on it.

Alex picked up the provided fork, “Okay, so John, you have the most experience with this sort of thing, but I was kind of under the impression that meals would be a bit more formal than this? With you know, a table?”

Ben nodded alongside him, but made no comment.

“Yeah, you’re right. This is most likely the only time this will happen. Part of the reason is to maintain the guise that they want us to get to know each other, and not be out for blood straight from the gate. But, the real reason is probably much more in-line with your expectations: not everyone is dressed for any of the dining rooms.”

Alex chuckled, knowing that the comment was directed at the jeans and t-shirt he never changed out of.

What John said was correct, of course, but there was more to it than that. This room was only ever used for the Selection and entertaining with the goal of gathering information, and there was a reason for that. The mirrors decorating the wall opposite the garden were all two sided, and as technology had evolved cameras and microphones were placed.

In the past, Kings and the staff in charge of gathering intelligence would stand in the small room to the side of the parlor and simply watch and take note of the going-ons inside. Now, people tended to rely on technology. George Washington had made the decision to keep away from the candidates outside of personal, face-to-face interactions.

The men making up the council had not, and neither had Lafayette.

Right at that moment, Lafayette was sitting in his study watching the candidates eat and interact with one another. George had asked for him to keep track, and so he would.

One camera caught Jefferson and his group perfectly, another was focused on Laurens, Hamilton, and Tallmadge, while the other two made it so everyone in the room was visible on his screen. The

majority of the group was eating their dinner in silence, and Laf wasn't focused on the majority.

Thomas was behaving as he usually did, hiding his anxiety behind a beautifully crafted mask of arrogance and bravado, with people hanging onto his every word. Madison was with him, as he usually was, saying nothing but listening to everything. Burr was also there, looking as calm and collected as he ever did.

Benedict Arnold was sitting next to Samuel Seabury. To Lafayette's knowledge, the two had never been close, and they both looked uncomfortable, with neither of them saying a single word.

The rest sat alone, scattered throughout the room. Half of them were playing with their food, while the others simply leaned back wherever they were sitting and stared out ahead of them - the one that he identified as Tench Tilghman, one of the few he didn't already know, seemed to be sleeping.

Lafayette knew of the resemblance between himself and Jefferson, and he knew that the King had never liked Burr all that much to begin with, and Madison didn't have enough personality in his pinky finger for George to take notice. The others were mysteries for the moment, but based on what he did know, Lafayette didn't have very high expectations for them.

It was the other three he deemed worthy of his attention.

John Laurens was someone who Lafayette could consider a friend, though they were far from as close as true friend would be. Life was different with a title, and they were both taught that from a very young age. It was that attitude that made most of the candidates blur together. Benjamin Tallmadge and Alexander Hamilton didn't come from that background.

What was even more strange was that based on their behavior, they didn't seem to have that same trust no-one outlook that the others did. Their conversation was awkward and far from personal, but it was not unpleasant. They were enjoying themselves as much as they could in the strange situation.

Lafayette had decided that Tallmadge and Hamilton were some of the ones to keep an eye on, and if they continued on this path, their apparent friendship would make that a lot easier.

He saw John's gaze sharpen as the two other men chatted, and Lafayette couldn't help but notice that Laurens' eyes strayed toward Hamilton more often than not. It could be a recognition of competition, or it could be something more. Nonetheless, Lafayette filed it away.

He sipped his tea and watched as the candidates' servants came and escorted them from the parlor to their private chambers.

The 12 were right now near perfect strangers who had just spent hours together in the same room with most achieving nothing. Lafayette knew of George's tendency to play odd sorts of games with people, and would no doubt enjoy his reports as the candidates began to get nervous as the days went by in a similar manner.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Alex had difficulty sleeping his first night in the palace, and so he was not the most pleasant of people the next morning when his servant woke him up.

Each candidate had an assigned personal staff of three. They had seemed a bit surprised when he had asked for their names - Gouverneur, Edward, and Maria - and when they didn't return his smile, Alex decided he'd let them attend to their duties and nothing more.

After waking him up, Maria left to fetch him a breakfast of eggs and a side of fruit, while Gouverneur brought in a rack of clothing. His plate was whisked away and Alex had just finished his last sips of coffee when that too was taken from him and he was shoved toward the attached bathroom.

Edward was there waiting for him, and directed him into the shower - handing him a toothbrush, washcloth, and different shampoos and body washes. Alex stepped out and was wrapped in a fluffy towel. Edwards put product in his hair and on his face, and when he was pushed out of the bathroom, Gouverneur removed his towel and started to help him into his chosen outfit for the day.

It was an uncomfortable process, being helped into your undergarments, but Alex supposed it was one he was going to have to get used to. His outfit consisted of a pair of black slacks with a modern fit that accentuated his ass, and a green button down shirt. He wasn't given a tie or jacket, so he assumed that he had a more casual day ahead of him.

After he was dressed, Maria pushed him down into a chair and started to fiddle with his hair. She left it down, but pushed back.

Once he was deemed ready, Edward escorted him from his chambers back to the parlor he'd spent time in the day before.

Alex was one of the last to arrive, and took his place between John and Ben, noticing that everyone else was also in the same seats from before. The only difference was that there was another face, standing along the far wall. Alex had thought it was Jefferson at first, but a second glance around the room showed him that Jefferson was sitting down in the corner.

The main difference between the two was that the unknown man had his hair pulled back, and wasn't wearing glasses. This must be the King's ward that Von Steuben had mentioned.

After the final two walked in, the redhead who took a seat by Arnold and a blond man, the newcomer clapped his hands and said, "Hello! It is so nice to meet all of you! I am Lafayette, for those of you who don't know me."

Lafayette paused, and made a gesture with his hand, and soon the previously unseen servants were handing something out to the 12. When Maria handed him a journal, he couldn't help but take notice of the fine quality of the leather and paper. It was the type of journal he always salivated over in the store, but could never quite bring himself to fork out the money for.

"So, these journals are a gift from me. They're for your use, and no one will read them. I find it helpful to write down my thoughts, and I'm sure many of you feel the same."

The journals were a tradition, and what most of the memoirs and stories about the Selections were based off of. From what Alex knew, they were kept private during the event, but afterwards many contestants would sell them or publicize them if they used them at all. When the first round was optional, most of those who went through with it were after some form of fame or the title.

When Lafayette didn't start talking after the journals were handed out, Ben asked, "Hey John, who is Lafayette? Like, what's he doing here?"

"Lafayette is the King's ward. He is french, and his family occupies quite a high position in their courts. He was orphaned at a young age, and after spending a season in our court, he decided he didn't want to go back. He was being raised by his grandmother at the time, but our King managed to officially and legally adopt Lafayette in a short span. He can't be the heir, because of the adoption, but he is second in line - third after the Consort is chosen."

Alex nodded along with Ben, and watched as Lafayette sat down in Jefferson's corner.

He looked at both of the men on his sides, "Well, we're all looking awfully snazzy aren't we?"

John shrugged, while Ben pulled at the wrists of his dark blue shirt, "I think it's funny that they kind of have us color-coded? I know I didn't get a say in what I was wearing, and I'm assuming it's the same for everyone."

Alex nodded, "Yeah, I read a little into these things before coming here, and apparently that's normal? It's mainly as an identifier. The council knows who we all are, of course, but it's easier to tell someone to watch out for someone in a specific color than it is to trust that they all know who everyone is."

John added, "And every King does it differently, so for all we know, a constant feed could be streaming to the King right now, and he's already deciding who he favors."

Alex watched as Lafayette stood and started to walk in their direction, "Hey, I think Lafayette is coming over here."

The three young men smiled and stood when Lafayette approached, each accepting the offered hand in turn.

He sat down in the chair closest to Ben, and smiled. It was an honest smile, something that Alex believed he'll start to find more and more rare the more time he spends in the palace, but his eyes are sharp. He doesn't doubt for a moment that Lafayette is cataloguing everything they are doing and comparing it to who they claim to be in that very moment.

The King's ward sinks his claws into Ben first, asking him, "You're Ben, right? What do you think of the Selection so far?"

It's a loaded question, and Alex was pleased to note that Ben tensed upon hearing it. There was no right answer to this, but there were many wrong ones, and one had to rely on their own intelligence to choose wisely. Ben was smart and went a more neutral route, "I don't think I've quite gotten over the shock of it yet, but I'm quite excited to see how it'll progress now that I'm here."

Lafayette nodded pleasantly before turning to Alex, "And you?"

Alex smiled, "It's far too soon to say anything, but I certainly find myself facing an adjustment period - it's one I'm looking forward to though."

Lafayette didn't address John, but rather continued to look at Alex, "So, Alexander, you're looking

forward to the adjustment. You're used to those, aren't you? Coming to New York to attend Columbia ought to have been quite the change from the islands, I imagine."

He froze. He should have known better, and he really should have expected this to be brought up in a setting where your background and name mattered so much, but he wasn't ready. His first instinct was to fight - to bare his teeth and dig into his opponent's weak spots. This wasn't the time or the place for that - he had to be civil. Everyone was listening, and this was potentially a moment that could make or break his time here.

Alex blinked, but kept the neutral smile on his face as he said, "Columbia is certainly very different from Christiansted, and the palace even more so. There's satisfaction to be had in knowing that I'm experiencing it all for the first time, and so these sort of changes have become something to look forward to."

He would have clapped himself on the back if he could have - that was by far the most civil he had ever been on that topic.

Lafayette looked at him for a moment, keeping the same smile on his face, before turning to John.

Alex had passed.

After that the odd sort of tension faded slightly, and their conversation became much more relaxed. John and Lafayette were clearly closer than Alex might have guessed, and their jokes and laughter put him and Ben much more at ease.

"Alright, so I'm sure you two have figured out that I'm here to get to know everyone - for the sake of fun, tell me something you don't think managed to be included on what you believe I've seen."

John laughed, but Ben and Alex shared a look. It was these sort of things that made them realize just how different their experience was going to be.

Ben spoke first, "I want to become a history teacher."

Alex was surprised, but didn't let it show. Ben had managed to work his way into Yale, something Alex knew was not an easy thing to do, and wanted to take that education to become a teacher. Lafayette apparently agreed with him because his eyebrows raised slightly, though he said nothing, only nodded.

When their eyes turned his direction, Alex shrugged and said, "French was technically my first language - it's what my mom spoke at home when I was little."

He didn't usually make a habit of talking about his mother, but given the way that Lafayette's eyes positively lit up, he had made the right decision.

Eventually Lafayette had to move on to visit with the others, and the three of them were left to themselves. Their conversation continued on as it had before, pleasant but not terribly detailed. Ben wanted to be a history teacher because he believed that there were lessons to be taught in the past, and he wanted to watch the next generation grow. He also said that the calendar more than made up for all the faults. Alex couldn't understand how one could go months at a time without working, but to each their own.

Lunch was served in a similar manner to their evening meal the day before, and John insisted that on this occasion it was most likely for convenience, for they were all dressed properly to attend luncheon in the casual dining room.

Alex couldn't stop the laugh from rising up when Ben said, "I thought that the King would have snuck a peek by now - maybe he just wants to lock us all together until we start battling it out. Fight to the death for the honor of being the consort, Lafayette is here to serve as the referee."

After the servants took the dishes and untouched food away, they opened the door out to the garden. Lafayette stood up and said, "Now, this is where I leave you all again. You are free to roam the gardens - in fact I highly recommend you do so. If you are not familiar with them, they are rather beautiful."

John was the first one to stand, already across the room before Lafayette had left. He had a journal in one hand, and a couple of pens in the other. When Alex hurried to fall into step besides the other man, John explained, "I just really love being outside, and Laf is right, the gardens are beautiful. Being in that room makes me feel all cooped up, and I don't like it."

Alex simply kept pace, and turned to see Ben walking behind them.

John led them to a set of benches along a path, and when Ben joined John on his, Alex took a seat on the one across from them. The other man threw a pen in his direction before turning to his journal. Ben and Alex followed suit, and as he was sitting beneath the tree, taking in the nature around them, he started to relax.

Writing was something he had always been able to channel his energy into, and after becoming very practiced at falling asleep in uncomfortable positions, it really was no surprise that he dozed off on the metal bench.

John smiled when he saw Alex's eyes close and his grip around the journal relaxed, but it wasn't an expression he allowed to linger on his face for long. At Ben's questioning glance, he simply pointed at Alex, and returned back to his drawing.

They sat in peace for the next half hour or so.

Their quiet was interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the path, and when John looked up to see who it was, it was only the figure's shake of his head that stopped him from standing up and bowing. John still nodded his head at the King as he walked by, and watched from the corner of his eyes as Ben's face took on an expression of shock as he did the same.

The King shot them a small grin, and paused in his stride when he saw Alex asleep on the bench. John saw the man's finger twitch, and watched with curiosity burning bright within him as George Washington brushed a dark strand of hair off of the other man's face before continuing on his way down the path.

By the time the King had left their sight, Ben was no longer as shocked, but nor did he seem entirely calm.

"Well, that was unexpected."

John nodded.

Chapter End Notes

Today is November 30th - the last day of the month of November, and the last day of

NaNoWriMo. I'm currently finishing up the final chapter, but I'm proud to be able to say that I've made the word count :-)

Chapter 8

The next week passed by in a routined blur.

Every day Gouverneur, Edward, and Maria would wake Alex up, feed him breakfast, and get him ready for the day. His outfits were always similar, and it seemed that emerald green was the color that had been assigned to him.

One of the trio would escort him to parlour he spent his days with the rest of the candidates.

The room was less silent now, with people actually speaking at a volume above a whisper. They ate their meals in a small, casual dining room, and they settled into groups. The King had yet to make an appearance, and so they became both more comfortable and more anxious as the days passed.

Alex did a very good job of keeping to himself, and if Hercules was there he knew he'd get a smile and a tight hug. It was a challenge, but one he managed to actually win at by drowning out Jefferson's obnoxious laughter by focusing on whatever Ben, John, or Lafayette were saying.

Their conversations had started to expand, for there was only so long you could talk about nothing before you got bored. Lafayette was an unexpected addition, but he tended to spend more time with them than with the others when he was in the room.

Lafayette spent more time with them, but he didn't participate in the conversation all the time - rather paying attention to the going-ons of the room around them.

Jefferson's court still existed, with the central trio being him, Madison, and Burr. The rest seemed to switch between who got to sit with them for the day, and who banded together. They weren't a very cohesive group, and watching them made Alex grateful he had lucked out with Ben and John.

Occasionally Tench would join them, but never for very long.

John was telling them about his siblings, and what it was like growing up in the southern courts, when Lafayette leaned forward, "Now, I'll be officially telling everyone very soon, but I thought that while I'm here I might as well tell you - the King will be sharing dinner with all of you this evening."

Ben and Alex shared a wide-eyed look. This had to be the longest the candidates had gone without meeting the King in the Selection, and to do so in a formal dinner setting seemed a bit strange. Usually the King would make his presence known, and go around to all of them much like Lafayette had the first couple days. Or at least, that's what the stories described.

George Washington was not like other Kings, apparently.

Lafayette continued after John nodded, "Now, I'm not telling you anything unique or anything that won't be immediately figured out, but know that the King is not likely to actually initiate any form of communication with anyone in this room no matter how the night goes. I believe that he is going to take the time to simply observe for himself after hearing others' opinions."

When none of them said a thing, Lafayette clapped his hands together and pushed his chair back in order to go stand at the front of the room as he did whenever he made an announcement.

"Hello Candidates! I know this past week had been quite the bore, but I come bearing good news!

This evening the King and some council members will be joining us for dinner.”

Lafayette had acted as if he wasn't doing them any sort of favors by telling them moments before telling everyone else, but it gave them the opportunity to observe the other's reactions. Jefferson and Burr maintained their bored expressions even if they seemed a bit more forced, but Tench, Seabury, and Arnold seemed much more alert and on the anxious side. Madison, Trumbull, and the rest didn't give any outward change. Alex focused on not appearing as if he was unsurprised by the news, but he had never been very good at disguising his thoughts and actions.

Lafayette left the room, trailed by his guards. Not long after the doors closed behind him did Alex look up to find Maria standing in front of him, “Hello sir, I believe it is time for you to get ready for your evening meal.”

He turned to say goodbye to Ben and John, but found them in similar positions, and instead simply followed Maria back to his chambers.

Alex had been under the impression that his morning routines thus far could fall under the category of primping, but what happened next proved that assumption to be incorrect.

When Maria opened the door to his room, he was greeted with the sight of both Gouverneur and Edward standing in some sort of ready position, and as soon as the door shut behind Maria, his clothing was removed and he was ushered into the bathroom. Rather than the typical shower, he found a steaming bath waiting for him, obviously treated with some combination of scented oils and soaps based on the look and smell of the water.

The water pressure of the shower was amazing, but this was a completely different experience. Sitting down in the water made it feel like his skin was burning and like every muscle in his body was being forcibly relaxed at once, and he couldn't help the moan that left his mouth as he sank into the tub.

He soon felt two hands in his hair, and heard Gouverneur say, “Sir, this is just a hair mask that we'll leave to sit for a while before washing and conditioning your hair as normal followed by some treatments and styling on Maria's part after you're done with your bath.”

Alex hummed in response, and kept his eyes closed as he felt someone start to scrub at his fingernails.

Gouverneur's hands were scratching at his scalp, and Edward was doing whatever he was doing to Alex's hands, and he simply let himself bask in the pampering. The last week had been a bit boring, but this right here sealed the deal. If winning the King's affections is what it took to get this kind of treatment on a regular basis, Alex was willing to duel the others to the death.

Edward started to massage his hands and wrists, and Alex couldn't help but think back to all the times his hands and wrists had cramped up from writing and how heavenly this would have felt.

Edward let go of his hands, and Gouverneur tilted his head back to rinse out the hair mask and wash his hair. While the conditioner did its magic, they put lotions on his face, and Alex was sure that this was the softest his skin had been in ages.

When he went back he was going to have to treat Hercules to a spa night.

Eventually the water began to cool, and Edward helped him out and wrapped him in a towel. He was led into the bedroom, and handed over to Maria's capable hands.

“Hello Ms. Maria, how are you today?”

All he got in response was a smile as she sat him down in front of the vanity and put more product than usual in his hair. Alex couldn't have continued the conversation if he wanted to as his voice would have been drowned out by the sound of the blowdryer.

He relaxed into the now-familiar routine, and was pleased to note that his hair was styled as usual, if only a bit smoother and shinier.

Thankfully the outfit that Edward laid out for him was similar to what he'd grown to expect. Obviously everyone was expected to be a bit more polished to greet the King, but the formality seemed to be about the same.

Alex was helped into his clothes in relative silence, and after taking stock of his reflection and nodding his approval, he was ushered back to the parlor.

Ben wasn't yet there when Alex sat down in his usual seat next to John. John's hair was pulled back in a slick bun, and his smile was as wide as ever, "Hey Alex! Did you enjoy the primping session?"

Alex smiled back, "I did, actually."

John chuckled, "I don't go out of my way to do that sort of thing, but I have to admit I love it."

He leaned back into the cushions, and examined his hands. Edward must have done something magical because he had somehow gotten rid of every sign of the calluses that had built up over the years.

He wasn't left alone to that for very long as John asked, "So, are you ready to meet the King, officially?"

"Officially? I've never met him, or seen the man in person. You have though, right?"

John nodded, "Yeah, I don't think I've ever really talked to him beside the general greetings. The southern court is pretty close to the Palace, so the formal functions and such are a common occurrence, and part of the reason why I'm as close to Lafayette as I am. He acts exactly as the media describes him to at those events."

"So keeps to himself in a dignified manner, and is never unpleasant. I believe I was read that 'King George rules the room from wherever he stands, capturing all of those around him in his aura with his strong shoulders and the hint of a smirk on his lips' somewhere."

Ben sat down just as Alex finished, "Smirk on whose lips?"

"Oh, the king's," John's hand settled on Alex's shoulder, "our boy Alex here was regaling me with the details shared in the tabloids that I'm sure he's never read before in his life."

They burst out laughing, and John's hand didn't move from Alex's shoulder.

Soon they calmed, and ignored the others' looks with a practiced ease, and Ben asked, "Hey John, I'm sure this whole dinner thing will be pretty easy for you - just another day at the office, after all - but is there anything important we should know?"

"Well, neither of you have made fools of yourself at our shared meals so far, so I think you're good. They'll put us through our paces with etiquette and formalities once the King starts actually looking at everyone through a more serious lens. For now we've just been getting settled. In a way, this marks the actual start of the whole Selection thing, you know?"

Ben and Alex didn't get a chance to say anything, as they heard the doors opening and saw Lafayette walk in.

"Hello my favorite candidates! Your first meal with the king, council, and myself is to be taking place shortly in the King's favorite dining room. Your servants and guards will lead the way after I leave, and make sure to sit where directed. I have personally made the seating arrangements."

Lafayette didn't linger, and not long after he left did Alex hear Jefferson's voice carrying over, "Lafayette made the seating arrangement - we'll be able to figure out who the favorites are already, just by where they're sitting! I doubt that Washington is going to want to deal with poor manners, so I'm sure class and breeding has factored into the decisions. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if I managed to be placed right by the King's side."

John's grip on his shoulder suddenly tensed, and Alex wasn't sure if it was as a warning for him to stay sitting, or an expression of John's own anger. Neither man said a word, but turned to face Ben, who looked as bothered by the statement as Alex felt.

"And here I thought Lafayette was trying to tell us that he put his favorites in the seats closer to the King, and correct me if I'm wrong here, but I think we're his favorites. I mean, unless I've read the situation wrong. John you know how this sort of thing works, what do you think?"

John nodded, "Yeah, I think you're right, especially knowing him. And since the council is also sharing the meal with us, there's a lot more to factor in than just favoritism. I don't know who everyone was brought in by - I'm pretty sure I was one of the ones selected on by the entire group, so I'll be pushed to the side in that sense."

It was Ben who asked, "How do you mean?"

"Well, the council is made up of a bunch of old men who don't really agree on anything, and while some certainly might not be the closest to the king, they're always vying for that visibility of being placed next to him and the titles and such that go with that sort of thing. Laf could potentially place one of the council members far down the table if he placed his candidate further up by the King, and thus displaying a rather neutral position. Both candidate and sponsor being at the end of the table doesn't bode well, while both sitting right with the King would certainly spark some competition."

Everything John was saying was making sense, but Alex still couldn't help but ask, "So I know that everything is political when playing in the courts, but what if the King were particularly close with a council member and Lafayette was fond of that candidate, and simply sat them closer to the front of the table for their company and nothing more?"

"Were this a more formal occasion, I'd tell you that there's absolutely no way of that happening. But, Lafayette would definitely do that sort of thing for his own entertainment. It'd keep everyone on their toes, and mess up people's perception of the rankings, if you want to call it that. Besides, Lafayette and the King will probably have a nice long discussion about everything afterwards."

Alex couldn't help the snort that came out when Ben said, "That's nice."

They watched as their servants filed in, and Alex followed Gouverneur out of the room and into what was apparently the King's favorite dining room.

There was one chair at the head of the table, presumably belonging to his Majesty, and name cards at every other plate. Alexander was more than surprised when Gouverneur brought him to the front of the table, with only one seat between him and the King.

The anxiety only started to creep in after he sat down. Alex pushed it down as much as he was able, and bit down on his tongue and focused on the silverware in front of him.

He was not left alone to his thoughts for long, as Von Steuben sat down diagonal from him, “Alex, my boy! How have you been? Enjoying the palace? Made any friends?”

The Baron looked exactly as he remembered him from a week ago, down to Ponceau standing at his side in a color-coordinating outfit.

“I’ve been well, thank you. Unfortunately, we haven’t had much time to explore, but I’ve enjoyed what I’ve seen. As for friends, I believe I have - though I suppose we can never forget that this is meant to be a competition.”

Von Steuben leaned forward, smirking, “One that I think you might be winning, judging by where you’re sitting. I have to ask - did you befriend our King’s ward on purpose, or did that happen naturally?”

John sitting down to his left offered the perfect opportunity to avoid the details of his apparent victory, “John! This is the Baron Von Steuben, he’s the man who brought me to the palace, I’m sure you’ve met before.”

John smiled a smile Alex would grow to recognize as the polite one he wore in political settings, and said, “Baron! It’s been quite some time, I’m afraid. It’s wonderful to see you again.”

The baron nodded, and soon they were joined by Ben, who seemed unsure of how to handle the older man at his side.

Almost everyone was seated now, with only the seats belonging to Lafayette and the King remaining unfilled. Ben, John, and Alex passed the time making smalltalk, and Alex watched the others do the same. It was interesting making the connections between the candidates and council members.

Lord Schuyler was Ben’s sponsor, and seated across from John. He seemed to be a kind man, talking for a few moments with Ben before turning to the others around him. Von Steuben would occasionally speak to Lord Schuyler as if Ben wasn’t there, but that was the only problem Alex really observed in their section.

Jefferson and his sponsor were close enough to their end not to cause offense, but far enough away to make it clear he was far from favored. In the long run the table seating meant almost nothing, but it was amusing to watch Jefferson’s face contort into various facial expressions as he took in the situation.

Alex was pulled from his thoughts by Lafayette walking into the dining room, and stood up along with the others when his friend took his place.

The King entered with no extra fanfare, all wonder from that moment could be attributed to their anticipation and how the man carried himself. Alex was sure it was a result of years of being raised in the palace and living with the weight of the crown, but part of him didn’t doubt that if they ran into each other in a different life, place, or time, he’d still be blown away by the others’ sheer majesty.

George Washington was just as bit handsome as described and as he appeared in the media. Alex had feared that part of it was just an act, but that was certainly not the case. And if Alex allowed his mind to wander, he couldn’t help but note that the King cut a very fine figure, and Alex

wouldn't mind knowing what he looked like underneath his tailored clothing.

His chair was pulled out for him by a servant, and everyone followed the King's example when he took his seat. The room was silent until his Majesty took a sip from his water glass and the rest of the room relaxed.

Lafayette turned to face Alex, "Hello! I know it hasn't been long, but your face is bringing me the joy I didn't realize I was missing."

Alex laughed, and so did John, Ben look amused even as he focused on drinking his water without spilling it over himself. He ignored the King's flitting glance, and decided that was the course of action he was going to take throughout the meal. He wouldn't ignore the King if he was addressed, but nor would he let his evening be ruined because he felt the need to act a certain way in his presence.

They were being observed, and it would work in his favor if he acted as if they weren't.

Alex would look up at the King every so often, and admire the strong line of his jaw, and watch as he would talk with Von Steuben and Lafayette. He always looked away when he saw the other man turning to face his direction.

He passed the rest of the meal in that manner, making small conversation with the men around him, and saying absolutely nothing to the King, but noting how his glance would drift toward him every so often. Alex took care not to let his posture drop, and to make his expression always appear pleasant.

After the final plates were cleared away, and the King and his ward left the room, Von Steuben offered Alex his arm, and directed him down a hall until they found themselves in a small parlor.

The other man sits him down, "Now, Alex, don't think I didn't notice the little game you were playing with his Majesty."

Alex raised a brow, "I wasn't playing any game with the King, I was simply conversing with my friends and the man who brought me to the palace."

Von Steuben gave him a long look, and then laughed. "Right, your sultry looks and preening are regular behavior, I'm sure. Now, I'm not upset, if anything I'm proud. If you're trying to win this, which I think you are, you're already closer than I could have imagined possible to having the King wrapped around your pinky finger."

That was not what he was expecting to hear, "First, I'll admit that I wasn't acting completely natural through the dinner, but I don't think anyone was, and I was far from giving the King bedroom eyes. And what do you mean? I haven't even made eye-contact with the man, let alone talked to him. Weren't you the one who said he likes attitude? He hadn't gotten any from me yet, I assure you."

The baron leaned further into Alex's space, "If that's you not giving bedroom eyes, I can't wait until I see the day that you do. And you have no idea what you look like, do you? You're attractive, but you already knew that. There's more to that than just your looks, boy. It's the spark in your eyes - the one that promises a retort - the one you try so very hard to hide. That's what got his attention for he is a very observant man."

"You're getting awfully poetic here."

Von Steuben smirked, "I try. Now, that is all I have to say to your for the time being. The King

will no doubt start his personal meetings soon, and I'll be disappointed to hear if he doesn't ravish you immediately on sight. I don't expect him to, but I'll be disappointed nonetheless. Now, off to bed with you."

When Alex left the room, he was greeted with the sight of Ponceau, "Come along now, Hamilton, was it? Yes, follow me."

He did as directed, and they walked in silence.

John was waiting for him outside of his door, and Ponceau gave him an odd look before turning on his heel and walking away.

"Hey, what was that about? I saw Von Steuben take you down the hall after dinner, something about the Selection, right?"

Alex nodded, "Yeah, he just wanted to tell me that it looks like I'm in pretty good standing so far, and he would like it if I remained so."

John fiddled with his fingers and said nothing for a moment or two, "Alright, I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Night."

Chapter 9

The atmosphere in the parlor was more tense than usual the next morning, every candidate aware that the dinner the previous night signalled the proper start of the Selection process. There were looks being thrown Alex's way, wondering what he, Ben, and John had done to be seated so close to the King.

The answer was nothing, but he doubted they would believe that.

Lafayette walked in much as he had on every other occasion, bouncing on his toes as he did whenever he had an announcement to make, "Hello again! I hope you enjoyed your dinner last night with his Majesty. Today he will be meeting with all of you one-on-one for a short time - in order to properly get to know you. I advise that you be yourself, as the King is looking for a lifelong companion from this, and he appreciates honesty in all things. Thomas Jefferson will be meeting with him first, and a guard will escort you to the library."

The arrogance that dripped off of Jefferson when he stood up to leave the room was one of the most disgusting things Alex had ever had the displeasure to witness.

Lafayette followed after Jefferson, and the candidates were silent in the time he was gone. Ben's eyes were narrowed as he stared at the floor in front of the, and John appeared to be forcibly relaxed. Between the two men, Alex was sitting ramrod straight and staring down at his fingernails as he went through the motions of a finger-strengthening exercise.

About fifteen minutes pass until the door opens and Jefferson walks back in with Lafayette, the two making an uncanny pair in their resemblance. If he was arrogant before, there was nothing compared to how he was acting now. When he sat down in his usual chair, Alex could hear him say, "You will never believe how easy that King is to ensnare, you'd think the ruler of our country would be a bit stronger in that regard, but no."

Alex wanted to retort, but the sharp glare from Lafayette told him that it wasn't his place.

Benedict Arnold's name was called next, and his bulky form looked more ungraceful than usual when compared to Lafayette. When he returned, his face seemed pinched as if he was swallowed a sour lemon.

Next went Samuel Seabury, then John Trumbull, and James Madison.

James was a small man, and Alex wouldn't be surprised to find that he wished for nothing more than to be left alone to his thoughts.

After James took his place, Lafayette walked over to them and grabbed Ben's hand, pulling him off of the sofa, "It is your turn, mon ami."

Alex reached up to pat Ben's back, wishing him luck, before closing his eyes and leaning back into the sofa, "John, man, this is so bizarre."

"It's not so bad."

"You're lying and you know it."

He heard John chuckle, and startled slightly when he felt the other man's head move onto his shoulder, "Maybe you're right."

Alex didn't push him off, "I usually am."

"Awfully sure of yourself, aren't you?"

He tilted his head back and contemplated the ceiling, "I have to be."

They sat in silence once more, this time more comfortable and relaxed. By the time Ben returned, Alex had closed his eyes, and he simply lifted his arm when he felt the other man sit on the couch. Ben sat in a position mirroring John, and Alex felt the most at peace he had since arriving.

He saw Lafayette smiling their way when he called in Burr.

Alex must have drifted off because one moment he was relishing in the warmth of the men at his sides, and the next he was being shaken awake by Lafayette, "Wake up mon ami, it is your turn to meet with the King."

He stood up with Lafayette's help, and accepted the good lucks from Ben and John, who had apparently gone while he was sleeping. Lafayette took him out of the parlor before handing him off to some unfamiliar guards, who grunted when Alex asked for their names.

They took him to a set of unfamiliar wooden doors, and knocked. A voice called in from inside, and the doors opened, providing Alex with the view of what couldn't be anything other than a library. He forgot that he was meeting with the King as he took in the shelves of books around him. This was familiar; this was a place he could call home.

He was in the palace library, and his fingers twitched when he caught the title of some of the volumes on the shelves. A sudden cough brought Alex out of his thoughts, and he felt very sad with the reminder that he was not there to read the books, but rather talk.

The only person who could have coughed had to have been the King, as the guards had left the library while Alex was still taking in the room. The man sat on one end of a chaise lounge, and seemed amused. Hopefully.

He straightened his spine, and did a short bow - the kind that John had told him his Majesty preferred in a private setting, going against the deep bows held for a minimum of three seconds the etiquette books detailed. Alex was glad he followed John's advice, as the King nodded, and didn't show any hint of annoyance on his face.

Alex wasn't stupid enough to think the man in front of him hadn't mastered the art of the mask, but there were certain feelings that he liked to think he could sense off of others. Annoyance was one he had learned to recognize at a young age, and the King wasn't displaying any signs.

The King was still as handsome as he had been at dinner, and all of a sudden Alex realized that he'd be spending at least the next ten minutes alone in a shared space, making eye contact with this man. This was one of those make it or break it moments, and Alex didn't want to break it.

He sat down on the other end of the chaise when the King smiled slightly and raised his hand. He made sure to sit in a way that provided personal space, but didn't make it seem like he wanted to be as far away from the other man as possible.

"So, Alexander, I saw that you were quite distracted."

The man's voice was deep and smooth, and while he had caught whispers of it over dinner, it was different hearing him say his name - the way the sounds were shaped made him want to hear it again and again.

Alex stared down at his hands in his lap to gather his thoughts, “Well, I’ve always felt at home in libraries, I suppose. I suddenly realized that I was in the palace library, and got sort of distracted by the books I was seeing and, uh, I kind of forgot that I was here to meet with you, your Majesty.”

There was a stillness to the other man - the kind that inspired people to come in closer to garner a reaction, the kind of stillness Alex had always wanted to possess for himself.

“You forgot? And here I was under the impression that I must be at the forefront of all your young minds.”

His hand went to the back of his neck and he chuckled, “Well, I mean - it’s not that I don’t think about you ever, it’s just that one, I don’t know you and I refuse to raise a false image of you in my mind only to have it shattered as time passes and two, I fell asleep.”

“You’re telling me that not only am I forgettable, “ the King leaned back onto the arm of the chaise, relaxing slightly, “but I am so unexciting that you fell asleep prior to our first proper conversation, leaving yourself at less than your best.”

“I wouldn’t say you’re forgettable, and I’ll have you know that even at my worst I’m fantastic.”

Alex felt something twist in his chest when the King’s smile grew, revealing a flash of teeth, “Is that so? Well, since you apparently don’t care about me, let’s talk about you. You’re a student, how is that going for you?”

He sat up and leaned closer to the King, much more comfortable to talk about this than his thoughts regarding the Selection, “Well, I’m mainly studying economics and finance, and I’m taking as much on political science and policy as I can without a family title. I’m a full-year student, and I’ve been debating whether or not I should seriously start looking into law schools.”

Something lit up in the King’s face, as if he was actually intrigued by what he was saying, “Why are you studying political science and policy when you can’t get a position with real power - if you’re taking those courses you know that the elected positions are a farce. And why combined with economics and finance - those are much more business oriented, aren’t they?”

“Well, I actually signed up for the first class by accident, but there was something about that called to me. I believe in a stronger central government, I just don’t think we have the right people running it. And while education is important, not all programs are equal, and memorization is useless without comprehension. A lot of the men and women who grow into the titles may know a lot as they’ve been exposed to it their entire lives, but they only know what they’re taught. For the most part, not a lot of them have a drive to go out and seek information. Also, they’re very America focused - which again, isn’t a bad thing - but we need to be comparing how our governments works against other countries, and how differences in systems might result in misunderstandings or more serious disagreements.”

The King nodded, “So you’re saying that the heirs who are going to be eventually be taking their parents places in government don’t care about what they’re not forced to, and because of that they’re quite close-minded because they don’t want to not be. And you’re saying that this is a problem.”

Alex smiled, “Yes.”

The King stared right at him, seemingly distracted by some thought that had captured his attention,

“That’s a valid point. What’s your proposed solution?”

“Well, do you care about our country?”

“Of course.”

“Then run it.”

The King laughed, not the chuckle of before, but a real, deep laugh. Alex would have been distracted by the sound and sight if he weren’t so offended, “Excuse me, but what’s so funny. It’s a very real suggestion, I’ve written many essays about why it’s a good idea.”

“What if the next in line for the throne is just like all those other heirs and doesn’t care?”

“You pick someone else.”

“Explain.”

Alex took in a deep breath, “Not like a popular election or anything, because for the most part people don’t know what goes into ruling a country. But, surely, among the long list of people in line to the throne, there’s one that’s more intelligent and impassioned than the rest. They all get the same education and training because of the Royalty Equality Acts of the 1880s. Really, all you would be doing is shifting the order around.”

“Then the royal family would change.”

“Not necessarily,” Alex shook his head, “I mean, technically yes, but you’re all related anyways. Just make a name change to Washington mandatory for the coronation.”

“But they wouldn’t actually be a Washington.”

Alex sighed, “I mean no offense, and I could be incorrect as these details are difficult to come by, but Lafayette is second in line to the throne yes?”

The King nodded.

“You did that when you adopted him. He’s not even American, and he hasn’t changed his name, but you consider him enough of a Washington to take over the throne should he need to.”

“You’re not wrong.”

“I rarely am.”

The King snorted, and Alex was surprised at the sound, and didn’t have enough time not to let it show on his face, and the King started to laugh again at the expression on his face.

“Alexander, I want you to know that I’ve been looking forward to this day ending, and laughter is not what I expected to get out of this introduction, if you would like to call it that. Thank you.”

Alex nodded, “You’re most welcome, your Majesty.”

The King leaned forward as if moving toward Alex, but stops with inches separating them, “I unfortunately have much to attend to, but I find myself looking forward to the next time we have the opportunity for time to ourselves.”

He felt the blush rising to his cheeks as the King stood and walked away, leaving Alex alone with

the guards.

The matters the King had to attend to included a meeting with his ward, who was waiting outside of the library, “Sir, I see that this meeting has gone a little bit over the allotted time. Am I to tell dearest Alexander his future at the palace is looking more and more secure the more you see of him?”

George laughed, “I wouldn’t go that far, but I will have you know that I may have hinted at such a thing myself.”

The expression on Lafayette’s face was one he’d treasure for years to come, for the combination of shock and delight would be difficult to recreate, “Sir! Playing favorites already! And with my Alexander?”

He simply smiled, “He’s very charming, and there’s a mind hidden behind those eyes. I find myself intrigued. Besides, I told you I stumbled upon him in the garden, he caught my attention then as well, perhaps it was a sign. And your Alexander? I believe that each and every single one of those boys is technically mine, for the time being.”

His ward laughed, “Technically, you are correct. Now that I know Alexander for sure is not leaving, do you know who you’ll be sending away? I know that you were planning on using these meetings to weed out those who didn’t pass muster.”

The King nodded, smile fading, “I do. Send James Madison, John Trumbull, Tench Tilghman, Samuel Seabury, Edmund Randolph, and William Grayson home. They’re all beautiful young men, but they’re all lacking a certain something.”

“Something that Alexander has.”

“Why are you so set on that boy?”

Lafayette shrugged, “Why not? I like him. Did you know he speaks French? When do you want the boys sent home?”

George did not know he spoke French.

“At the end of this week.”

Chapter 10

No one was sure how to act the days after the meetings with the King. The first day or two had been interesting, as everyone had been trying to make it seem as if they had managed to worm their way into the King's good graces.

Lafayette visited with them as usual, but he gave no news or sign of how everything went, and people started to quiet down. It became as if nothing ever happened, almost the same as before the dinner if not for the tension.

John and Ben had pounced on him when he walked back into the parlor, asking how the meeting went, and what happened that made it last so much longer than the rest.

Alex had grinned, and said, "I went on a small rant, and he just kind of listened."

Ben had been horrified, and John surprised, but they both noticed Lafayette's small grin when he came back into the parlor, so they stopped worrying.

One evening they all said their good nights as they went to their separate chambers, and the next morning six of the candidates were absent.

Alex had shared a look with Ben and John, but none of them said a word.

Jefferson did not follow their example, "I wonder what they did to be sent home so early on. It's awfully strange that six were sent away, usually it's one at a time. I mean, it's obvious what's happened - the King's kept the real contenders, and then a couple for show."

The last bit had been said while staring pointedly at Ben and Alex, and John stood up and said, "You might have a point, Thomas, but don't think I didn't notice that your precious James was sent away, your dearest Madison obviously wasn't that great."

John had stepped closer to Thomas as he spoke, and less space between them, the more obvious the height difference became. Jefferson leaned down, "Don't think I'm ignorant enough to think that James is meant to be at the King's side, Laurens. You know that just as well as I do - he's much too delicate, he needs more personalized care and the stress of the position of consort could potentially do him in. But you're just redirecting the conversation from the fact that your two buddies over there are only here for public image."

Alex wouldn't have placed Thomas and Madison as close, but as offended as the man was, he wouldn't be surprised to find out they were involved.

"What public image," John was angry, "would the palace get with Ben and Alex? They're two pretty boys, and Tench was too. Just because they don't have titles doesn't mean they're going to get a pity vote from the public. And public image doesn't matter in this, you know that. They're here because the King wants them here."

John and Jefferson were pulled apart before the argument could escalate, and Lafayette walked in just to see Burr sitting Thomas down and Ben pulling John to his chest. He sat down next to Alex and asked, "What happened here?"

"Jefferson made some comment about six being cut, and John took it as an insult toward Ben and I and brought up Madison being sent home."

Lafayette nodded, "John has always had a bit of a temper."

"I didn't notice."

They took care the next few days to not let their tempers get the best of them. How one acted with their peers during times of disagreement was important to take into consideration when thinking about the official tasks the consort would take on.

The solution was to retreat further into their groups - Burr taking Madison's place, and Arnold falling in with Jefferson and Burr without Seabury to lean against.

Alex became closer to John and Ben, and Lafayette was as friendly as ever with them when he visited. The three still sat on the same sofa, but without the inches of space between bodies. They'd wander the garden, and John would draw while Alex and Ben would read and write. It was relaxing, and far too boring for Alex to be comfortable with.

Hercules' short letters wanted to know all about what was going on at the palace, saying that nothing much had changed at school. Alex would fill pages and pages up with descriptions of the other candidates, how they didn't have anything to do, and more recently about the King.

One day while they were sitting under a tree in the garden, John had fallen asleep on Alex's shoulder. He didn't think anything of it and continued to write. Ben seemed to find an opportunity in it, "Hey, Alex, what do you think about John?"

He didn't look up from his journal, "What do you mean?"

"I don't know, what's he getting from helping us out so much?"

When Alex looked up, he saw genuine curiosity on Ben's face, "I mean, I don't think he's that close with Jefferson and them? Like, they know each other? But they're not friends. I can't really blame him for trying to talk to new people, from what I've heard, growing up in the courts is its own kind of isolation."

"I guess," Ben shrugged, "you're probably right. But what do you think of him personally?"

"He's cool. I feel like if we had met outside of this we'd be friends. I think the two of would be too."

The questions were odd, but Ben didn't ask any more.

When it was time for dinner, they made their way to the dining room, except this time Lafayette joined them, sitting at the head of the table.

Meals times were when the others' absence was most noticeable, as there were six empty seats at one end. Before, there was always the sound of a whispered conversation from down the table, but now they sat close enough that any words spoken would be heard by all.

Lafayette had news for them, judging by his bouncing in his seat. Alexander would never understand how so much energy was contained in his body.

"Everyone, I have the most exciting news for you! We will be having our first ball of the Selection! This will be when we will formally introduce you to the public and the court, as until now, there haven't been any updates since the announcements of the screening."

Alex knew that there was going to be a ball eventually, and a part of him had been waiting in

anticipation - who didn't at least once dream of a real life ball, with woman in ball gowns spinning across the dance floor. It was the stuff of fairy tales, and something he longed to be a part of.

There was just one problem - he didn't know how to dance.

He kept that to himself as he ate his meal, answering questions asked of him and asking his own in return. Jefferson and Burr were sitting across the table and discussing the last balls they had gone to, with John nodding and making comments as the conversation progressed.

Ben sat stiff beside him, and Alex was relieved when the other man relaxed when he elbowed him in the side and smiled. They were in the same boat for this, and the anxiety was to be expected.

If any of the others noticed, they didn't say anything.

The next day Alex was lead to a small ballroom instead of the parlor, and while he was grateful for the change a pace, there was something intimidating about the large room, empty except for the small number of people gathered in the corner.

Today they'd be going over the protocol they were all expected to follow. There would be a photo shoot of sorts before the event started for the official press featuring the candidates, and Lafayette was determined to make sure they knew all their best angles and poses before hand so that a magazine couldn't publish an unflattering photo in case they offended the wrong person.

People liked to play favorites, and it wouldn't do to give people extra ammunition to make a case.

Arnold was the one who had the most trouble with Lafayette's modeling tips - he seemed uncomfortable in his own skin, and made the poses look like painful contortions. Jefferson had done it before, as he felt the need to remind everyone, and Burr, John, and Ben were too beautiful to be captured any other way on camera. Alex was pleased when Lafayette told him he shouldn't come across any problems in regards to his appearance.

Practicing making faces in front of a camera wasn't something that could be dragged out for hours on end, and soon they were being paired off to practice a waltz.

Jefferson and Burr went first, a beautiful pair, and the graceful way they moved their limbs in time with the music was breathtaking.

Lafayette grabbed his and John's hand and pulled them into the middle of the floor after the first pair's song ended. Alex could feel his stomach twisting as he looked over John's shoulder, "Uh, Laf, before you turn on the music, I think you should know that I, uh, don't know how to do this."

It was easy to forget when spending hour upon hour in each other's company how different their backgrounds were, and this was a harsh reminder. Sound carried in the ballroom, and everyone heard.

Jefferson couldn't resist making a comment, "How have you gone this long and never learned how to waltz, Hamilton?"

"Well, it might have something to do with the fact that not everyone had a professional dance tutor before they could walk." He could feel his shoulders tensing up, and he knew that if he tried to dance now he'd just look stiff and awkward.

John saved the day, "It's easy to forget that sort of thing, sorry man. It's fine though, I can teach you - it's not difficult. Laf, help a guy out, will you?"

Lafayette jumped right in, grabbing Burr's arm and dragging him until they were right beside Alex and John, "It's not that bad, and I've seen you be graceful at times - I know it's somewhere in there beneath your brain. And it is important that you learn, since all of you will be sharing at least one dance with the King."

John took one of his hands in his, "Put your hand on my shoulder, I'll be leading for now," and placed his free hand at Alex's waist.

He could feel the heat from John's hand through the fabric of his shirt, and he wondered what it would feel like when it was the King and there were more layers separating skin. The King's hands were larger, stronger, would most likely feel more secure against his waist - the small of his back if they started to push at the rules of propriety.

"I'm going to start slow, but I believe in learning by doing, so just follow along," and then John started to count, "One, two, three. One, two three."

They were moving at a slow pace, each step clear and obvious. It wasn't the hardest thing Alexander had ever done, but looking into John's eyes made him realize that there was too much feeling in the other's gaze.

"Keep eye contact with your partner, and try to make conversation if the atmosphere and mood call for it. Don't look down at your feet - you're more likely to step on their toes if you're thinking about it. Just let your body move with the music."

Alex nodded, and John started to go faster. It was still a comfortable pace, and he could see that Jefferson had started to lead Ben around the room in a mirror of himself and John. There were thousands of thoughts running through his mind, but the loudest was about just how happy John looked.

He looked at peace, and his smile was the widest Alex had seen.

It was rather obvious, looking back on it. John had always left less space between himself and Alex than he had with the others - always turned toward him first when asking questions. Some part of John Laurens had become infatuated with Alexander Hamilton.

Alex didn't know how deep the other man's feelings went. It could be a passing thought, a rich boy caught in the blue eyes of a young man he was meeting for the first time, or it could go deeper. This wasn't an unfamiliar situation, but it wasn't one he prepared himself to deal with.

Ben knew, looking back on the questions he had been asking him in the garden that day.

If this was any other time, and any other place, Alex knew he might have fallen hard and fast for John Laurens, but this was a competition that Alex was determined to win. And winning involved feeling some sort of affection for the King.

He couldn't fall for John Laurens.

But Alex wouldn't mind having him as a backup plan, and so he smiled back.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day of the ball had arrived.

Alex knew not because anyone had told him, but because his breakfast featured fruit and a beverage he was informed had the essential minerals and protein in it, but wouldn't cause him to become bloated or any other digestion problems. This was the breakfast one had before a day they would be paraded around.

He was treated to the same primping ritual he received every time he was presented before the king, except this time it was somehow elevated. The same treatment and massage his hands and arms were treated to was extended to his feet and ankles - as if prepping him for hours of standing in uncomfortable shoes and being stepped on.

Gouverneur conditioned his hair to its maximum potential, so that after he had gotten out of the tub and was sitting in front of Maria in a robe, she used a mysterious cocktail of products to get it the softest and most shiny he had ever seen it.

Normally at this point, she would slick it back in that magical way where it still seemed fresh but managed to stay in place. Today, she grabbed a couple of hot tools and started to curl his hair, setting each strand in place with a pin after she removed it from the barrel.

Alex looked ridiculous when she was finished, but he didn't say a word. His hair was longer than it ever had been, and he was sure she had simply decided to play that up a bit.

The suit Edward pulled out for him was much fancier than anything he had seen, and it was traditional black and white.

"Are they not color-coding us for the ball?"

Gouverneur walked in carrying a tray, "Not in the way they have been, it'll be much more subtle. The colors will be in the accessories - for example in the stones and metals of your cufflinks. All six of you will be wearing matching outfits, and I imagine Jefferson will request a cane and or top-hat, and Burr will be wearing his lordship ring."

"Will I be having an extra accessories?"

Maria walked over to Gouverneur, and lifted a ribbon off of the tray, "It won't do for you to be having anything overly extravagant, but you will be having a ribbon in your hair."

He raised a brow, "A ribbon?"

"Of course!" Maria had a beautiful laugh, "You didn't think we'd be letting you out without a hint of green now, did you?"

Alex lifted his shoulders in a shrug.

The lunch was similar to his breakfast, this time including a salad.

He had expected Maria to start fiddling with his hair once he was forced to the chair again after

spending a couple hours writing, but instead she started to put lotion on his face.

“Maria, what are you doing?”

She laughed, “Today you’ll be getting photographed and properly introduced to the court, I’m just putting some lotion on right now for a base. I’ll be doing some minimal makeup - just enough to even out your skin tone, cover your under eye circles, and tame your brows. Maybe some clear mascara and some light lip tint - contouring is always a good thing if we feel like it.”

“Won’t they be able to see the makeup? Like when people have it on and it’s really obvious?”

Maria shook her head, “No Alex, this will just be a tinted moisturizer - your skin is unfairly near perfect already - so it’ll be near invisible.”

“I don’t have that much of a say in this, do I?”

“Not really, no. Well, you could, but I think you’d regret it - the tabloids would tear you apart. The others are for sure wearing some, and the difference would be noticeable in photographs.”

He sat back and let her work her magic, zoning out as fingers and brushes moved along his face, moving his head as directed. It was just a part of the primping process, and all the time dedicated to him was nice.

When he opened his eyes to look in the mirror he was pleased to see that he still looked like himself, just smoother - more groomed.

After he was told to close his eyes and Maria sprayed something on his face, “Setting spray”, the pins finally started to be removed from his hair. Which each clip she took out, a perfect spiral curl was released. By the time they were all out, his hair looked even more ridiculous than it had before.

“Are you sure you know what you’re doing?”, Alexander asked.

He received a smack on the shoulder in reply, “Of course I do, I’m not done yet.”

The sensation of her fingers running through his hair after it being clipped up all day was beyond words. There was obviously a method to her madness, as when she pulled away, his hair had righted itself into beautiful and perfectly formed soft curls.

Alex reached a hand up, “I’ve never had my hair curled before.”

Maria’s smile was beautiful too, “I imagine it’s not the most common thing. I’m going to smooth the top out a bit more into waves, and then we’re going to pull it back.”

She did as she said she would, using a comb to brush everything back before tying the bow at the nape of his neck.

Admiring himself in the mirror, Alex could admit it wasn’t a bad look. He had worn his hair in ponytail before Maria had started styling it every day, and she had just elevated it until it was polished and striking enough to be worn to a formal ball.

Gouverneur helped him into his clothes, and Edward straightened his lapels, tied his tie, and put on the emerald and gold cufflinks.

“Now, Alexander, as your assigned servant I have no place to say such things, but might I say that

you look positively dashing this evening?”

Alex smiled wide at the man, “Why thank you, Gouverneur! You most certainly may!”

He didn’t get much more time to stare at his reflection, as there was a knock at the door to his chambers, and Edward opened it to reveal guards who were waiting to escort him to the ballroom.

It was still early, and there were staff flattering around the space, but Alex was directed to Lafayette and his fellow candidates standing toward a wall, with a group of photographers standing a couple of feet away.

Alex made his way to stand between Ben and John, ignoring John’s appraising look. He smiled at both of them, and looked at Lafayette when the other man began to speak.

“Great! Now that you’re all here, we can start with the photographs. There are three that have come to the palace for this purpose, so we’ll be doing it in two rounds. Jefferson, Burr, and Laurens are first. We’ll be doing it against this wall here, since it offers a nice backdrop.”

There seemed to be a couple poses they were all being rotated through: standing straight and staring ahead, smiling and leaning slightly as if caught mid-laugh, and then whatever artistic movement the photographer felt like capturing. Jefferson was twirling his cane and kicking his leg into the air, while Burr was more subdued and put a hand in his pocket and looked at the ground. John, on the other hand, was repeatedly jumping into the air in order to get that perfect shot.

It didn’t take long at all, which meant that Alex was standing on the other side of the camera in much less time than he preferred. This was a new experience for him, and one he wasn’t sure he was a fan of.

The photographer motioned him to stand in a certain spot and said, “Now, I want you to be a little angry, or happy, or defiant - whatever makes your eyes do a thing. People are all about the blank facial expression with emotions visible in the subject’s gaze. Whatever makes that work for you, do that.”

It was a confusing direction, but one Alex did his best to follow. The smile pose was a bit easier, and the photographer smiled wide at his camera after snapping a few shots of Alex pushing a loose strand of hair behind his ear, so he took that as a good sign.

The photographer stared at Alex for a good moment or two, before walking over and grabbing his left arm, “Put this in the air, and kind of turn on your side. I want to be able to get your coat tails. Don’t forget to tilt your chin up.”

The man seemed satisfied with the photos, so Alex could only stand by and hope they turned out okay.

He isn’t given much time to worry, as the candidates are shuffled into a nearby sitting room, joining the council members already there.

Von Steuben stands and walks in his direction upon spotting him, followed by Ponceau, “Alexander! You look ravishing! Our George will have a very difficult time keeping his eyes off of you, or if we’re very lucky, his hands. Your servants know what they’re doing. It’s amazing that all six of you are wearing the same thing, and yet you still manage to look better.”

“Uh, I wouldn’t go that far.”

The baron tilted his head back and laughed, drink sloshing in his hand, “Of course you will! I

already told you how this will end if I have my way, and I don't even have to put in any effort with you being, well, you. Promise to save me a dance - I do love the thought of making the King jealous."

Alex nodded, and watched as the baron walked away, with Ponceau giving him one last look before following.

He was soon joined by John, "You know, I've never quite been sure how to deal with Von Steuben."

Alex turned his head to look at his friend, "What do you mean?"

John shrugged, "I'm not sure. There's just something that's always seemed off about him, I guess - like he knows more than he should. In the palace, most people do, but I feel like the difference is that he could actually change things to go his way. A lot of people don't think very much of him, and I think that's where his power lies."

They spend time mingling, sitting on a sofa - stiff so as to not wrinkle their formal clothing. After what could have been hours, Lafayette walks in and calls the candidates over. As Alex stands up, he finds Ponceau standing at his side, "I have been told to correct your appearance."

"I didn't think anything was wrong with my appearance?"

Ponceau snorted, "There is always something to be corrected."

Alex watched as the frenchman's hand approached his face and pulled a lock of Alex's hair out of its ribbon, "There, loose curls always entice. You ought to be better at this whole seduction thing, considering where you are. Even if you don't capture the King, there are always men looking for young bodies to adorn with their possessions and claim as their own."

He supposed that Ponceau thought he was being helpful, and he seemed to be happy enough with his current state of affairs, so Alex was grateful for the thought behind his advice, but that didn't mean he was going to go after some rich lord just because he could.

Alex was more than capable of making his own way in life.

Lafayette pairs them all up - Jefferson and Madison, Arnold and Ben, and Alex with John - and lines them up in front of a large set of doors leading into the ballroom, "Alright, so you will be announced as the candidates remaining in the Selection, and then you will have the floor for a song in order to overwhelm our guests with your beauty and grace. You will be expected to mingle afterwards, though feel free to dance with each other if you find yourself lacking a partner. The King will dance with each of you at least once, perhaps more if he wishes to make his favor obvious. This might seem like a lot for those of you unfamiliar with it, but remember to have fun."

The doors opened into the ballroom that was now full of guests and staff lining the perimeter, and Lafayette lead the way, and went to stand at the side of the King, who looked magnificent in his formal wear.

Alex did his best to stare straight ahead, and not focus on the handsome monarch. His hand felt clammy in John's, but he didn't have very long to think about that before he felt his friend's hand at his waist and he was being twirled around the open space.

John's eyes were sparkling, "So, how does it feel?"

He was careful not to lose his mental count of the music when he asked, "What do you mean?"

“Being the center of attention, of course!” John laughed, “I haven’t felt this many eyes on me since I was formally introduced to society. Though, I know that it’s not me they’re looking at.”

“Huh?”

John’s gaze got much more intense, but somehow didn’t lose its sparkle, “They’re looking at you, of course. Me? I’m old news - but you’re the fresh new blood that rumor says is Washington’s favorite.”

“I’m not Washington’s favorite! I’ve talked to him once!”

The song ended before John could say anything, and soon the hand on his waist was replaced with Ben’s, “Apparently we’re having three dances? I’m not sure? I just did as Jefferson said when he came to dance with Arnold.”

Alex nodded, “Alright, okay, so let’s do this. You’re leading - one, two, three, one, two, three.”

Ben had a beautiful laugh, and one that caught some of the other nobles’ attention judging my the looks aimed their way, “You’re being ridiculous.”

“Hey! You know this just as well as I do!”

“And we’re doing just fine, aren’t we?”

“I guess,” Alex peered over Ben’s shoulder, and saw the King standing with Lafayette at his side, talking with some people of no doubt high standing.

He liked to think that the three pairs looked dashing and charming and all sorts of striking as they twirled across the floor, but Alex was much too realistic to maintain such illusions. Ben didn’t say anything else during the of their dance, but it was a comfortable silence. They were both anxious for the ball, and for their dances with the King. This was their introduction to society, and it was common knowledge that the aristocracy was made up of sharks of the most vicious sort.

Their song soon ended, and it was only Burr standing between Alex and those who peered at him with hungry eyes.

“Hello, Alexander.”

“Hello, Lord Burr, sir.”

Burr had the special skill of showing absolutely no emotion on his face and still manage a pleasant expression, it set Alex on edge, but he had come to expect nothing more from his fellow candidate.

“There’s no need to call me sir, Alexander, we’re on equal footing in this particular game.”

The other man’s movements were as graceful as his voice was smooth, and Alex felt the envy start to rise, “Despite the technicalities, I am uncomfortable dropping all formalities in this setting.”

Burr nodded, and said not another word for the rest of their dance.

When the song ended, Burr escorted him to the edge of the floor before disappearing into the crowd.

The next hour or so passed in a daze. Alex didn’t have more than a moment of reprieve between dances, being passed off from Lord to Lady to whoever else was there. One of the men had been Lord Schuyler, who had set his three daughters upon him.

Angelica had been as intelligent as she was beautiful, if not more so, and had no problem showing that asset off. She had been charming and proud, with a ring on her left hand that couldn't be mistaken for anything other than a marker of her engagement. She had passed him off to her sister, Eliza, with the words, "If you make it through this Selection alive, feel free to call on me."

Alex wasn't entirely sure why he would ever need to, but he wasn't stupid enough to ignore such an offer.

Eliza was also beautiful, in a different way than her older sister, and much kinder. Alex was sure she had the same brain, but she seemed so much more worried about fostering her kind heart. Her laugh was a pure delight, and Alex found himself smiling for the duration of their dance. Eliza had found her sister, and handed him off with a grin and a giggle, saying she hoped to meet him again.

Peggy reminded him of Maria, just much more polished as suited for such an occasion. Her dress was yellow and her cheeks were pink with the champagne he had seen her sneaking away from the waiters away from her sisters' and father's eye. Everything she said made him chuckle and grow more fond of the young woman.

Alex had been looking forward to a break for his poor feet, but was not granted one. Instead, He felt Lafayette's hand on his shoulder as the man asked Peggy, "Would you mind if I were steal this gentleman away for a dance? I've been eagerly awaiting my opportunity."

Peggy had hiccuped, curtsied and spun away, leaving Alex in Lafayette's arms.

"Well, hello."

Lafayette's energy didn't seem to fade even when Alex knew the man had been awake since dawn helping the candidates with their preparations, "Hello, mon ami! I see that the Schuylers got their claws into you - what do you think of our belles?"

Alex chuckled, "I found them all quite charming. The three are very bright, and I fear any man who manages to spurn one of them, for I would not wish to find myself on the wrong side of their wrath."

"Neither would I, neither would I. Fortunately for us, I do not fear that we will ever have to deal with such a situation."

"Fortunately."

Lafayette spun Alex in circles around the room, laughing and talking all the while. At one point, they found themselves next to the King, who was dancing with John. They looked to be enjoying themselves, but no more than any other pair on the floor. John shot a smile his way, before looking back at his partner.

"Now, I do believe his Majesty will ask you to dance next," Lafayette whispered in his ear, "I am personally looking forward to see what kind of pair the two of you make. That's how I judge a couple - how they look while dancing. Not necessary in looks, mind you, but in spirit."

Lafayette's tone was serious, so Alex nodded along despite the butterflies he could feel rising in his stomach.

His friend was right, of course. The music stopped, and out of the corner of his eye he could see the King and John approaching, shoulders straight and stride confident.

Alex couldn't tell you exactly what was said, but soon he was overwhelmed by the proximity of the

King. The man's hand was hot against his waist and, his hand was dwarfed by the King's, and he felt the room around them fade away as their eyes met.

He both wanted to step closer into the other man's warmth, and run away as to avoid confronting the urge. It was a strange mix of feelings, and one that didn't make the nerves in his chest go away.

Alex couldn't focus on that for very long, as the King's deep voice interrupted his thoughts, "Lafayette told me that you had never learned to dance before arriving at the palace, and yet I find myself struggling to believe such a thing."

"And why is that, your Majesty?"

"You're incredibly gifted," the man said with a small smile gracing his lips, "and far too graceful for it to be true."

"You're flattering me, but I promise you that Lafayette told you the truth."

"Lafayette rarely lies."

The King's hand shifted so that it was against the small of his back, and as a result, Alex found himself shifting closer to the other man, further emphasizing their difference in size.

"So, your Majesty, are you enjoying yourself this evening?"

The man nodded and said, "I do believe I am. After a certain point these become dreadfully boring, but this one has its own excitement to it - the kind one finds at the presentation galas, where the air is ripe with potential."

"Potential for what?"

The King chuckled, "Now that is entirely up to you, and me, and everyone else in this room. That is why it is so excited, because we don't know."

"Is there anything you're looking out for in particular?"

Alex wasn't ignorant to the eyes on them, and he could feel something in the air, and he wouldn't be surprised if everyone else did too. Perhaps Von Stueben had been right, or maybe this had been happening the entire time with all the others and Alex just hadn't been paying close enough attention.

All of that could be pondered later, but for now he could listen to the King.

"Well, I still fancy myself a romantic. I have dreams that I've had since childhood that I haven't completely managed to squash, perhaps one of those will come true, even if I don't expect it to. There are always scandals at play, and maybe one of those will come to light. Maybe it is not I who will find a partner, but one of you. It wouldn't be the first time candidates fell in love. I don't think I'd mind it, depending."

Alex took in a breath, "depending on what, your majesty?"

The King didn't get a chance to answer that question, as the music stopped. George Washington removed his hand from Alex's back, and stepped away, still holding a hand in his. They didn't break eye contact as the King slowly bowed over their connected hands, and kissed Alex's knuckles.

He felt a gasp escape his lips at the contact, but had enough of a mind to bow back.

Alex made his way to Ben, who he saw standing along the wall with a flute of champagne in hand.

“Hello,” he said, out of breath and distracted by the thoughts racing through his brain.

Ben nodded, “Hello to you too, Alex. I do believe you’ve set the hearts of every single person in this room aflutter.”

“How so?”

“You’re not the first candidate the King has danced with this evening, and I know he has yet to dance with Arnold or Jefferson, but you are the only one who he kissed the hand of.”

Alex grabbed the glass from Ben, and downed half of it, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

His friend laughed, “You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

“I don’t even know if I want to be here, and you’re trying to tell me all these lies.”

Ben shook his head, still laughing, and said, “Well, I feel like you should figure that out soon, and I’ll have you know that I am telling only the truth.”

“Nope. I don’t believe you.”

Ben continued to laugh as he took the now empty glass from Alex’s hand and placed it on the tray of a waiter that walked by.

Alex didn’t drink any more champagne, and the ball passed in enough of a rush that he didn’t need it. Everytime he found himself spinning across the floor in the arms of yet another stranger, he’d find his mind wandering back to the strong arms of the King, and the feel of his lips on the back of his hand.

He remembered dancing with Von Steuben who had imbibed much too much liquor at the point, and had been speaking in a mix of French and English, “You’ve done it, my boy, you fluttered your eyelashes just right you did. I wouldn’t be surprised if the King paid you a visit tonight, if you know what I mean. I would, if I didn’t have my dearest Pierre to keep my bed warm. But our King is a much stronger man than I will ever be. You will have to take care of yourself, I’m afraid. The day that man’s will breaks, I’m sure you’ll be in for a treat.”

Von Steuben was one of the last people he had danced with, and it was with great relief when he found himself back in his chambers, with Edward helping him take care of his clothing and Gouverneur running him a hot bath to sooth his sore feet and relax his muscles before getting to bed.

Alex was wearing a fluffy robe Edward had put around him after he was undressed, and sitting while Maria brushed out his curls when he heard a knock at the door.

When Gouverneur opened the door, John came bursting in, much to Alex’s surprise. He didn’t say a single word before he put a hand on either side of Alex’s face and leaned in.

John’s lips were chapped, and tasted of champagne.

He didn’t push John away, but he didn’t make any move to continue the kiss either, and John pulled away for a moment, before leaning in once more.

The second kiss was much softer, but didn't last as long as the first.

“Alex, please say something.”

Alex took in a deep breath, and licked his lips, “This is too much to think about right now, I think you should go.”

Chapter End Notes

I made a Ko-Fi so if you ever want to [buy me a coffee](#) you can <3

Chapter 12

Alex knew that if he wasn't as exhausted from the ball and as relaxed from the bath as he had been, it would have taken him many hours to fall asleep. After John left and Maria finished brushing out his hair, he was able to go to bed and fall asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

It was an easy morning, and Alex didn't have anywhere to be until dinner.

John had kissed him last night. He had walked into his chambers without saying a word, and kissed him.

Alex wasn't surprised. He knew that John was here more because he had been brought in than because he wanted to be. He had even guessed that John had some sort of feelings for him, Alex just hadn't expected his friend to act on them.

Something must have sparked it - too much to drink, a misheard conversation, a comment made directly to him.

In any other context, Alex would have kissed back, maybe would have encouraged more. But he was in the palace, and becoming interested in and attracted to the man whose heart he was trying to win.

He didn't want to lose John's friendship, and if neither of them neither won, he wouldn't mind testing a relationship with the other man.

But how do you tell your friend that they're second place to the King?

Alex didn't have to answer that question just yet, as there was a knock at the door, and Maria emerged from somewhere to open it and let Lafayette in.

Lafayette was smiling, and said hello to Maria, who blushed, before he turned to Alex who was still in bed and said, "Now, I have something to ask you."

"Shoot."

Lafayette clapped his hands together, and stepped forward to sit on the edge of the bed, "Alright, so next weekend all of the remaining candidates are going to go home to their families, escorted by a guard, and maybe even one of their palace servants."

"Okay," Alex nodded.

"I have decided that I will be going with you for the weekend, if you'll accept me."

There were a ton of things Alex could have focused on, but the one that stood out the most was the image of Lafayette standing in the middle of the living room at the apartment in some ridiculous cartoonish contrast.

"If you want, I guess. I mean, you do know I live in a very small apartment with a very not-small man - it's gonna be a bit different from the palace. Also, why?"

Lafayette smiled, and Alex found himself smiling along when he said, "One must always be willing to try new things, Alexander! And why not?"

"Cur non?"

“Exactly!” Lafayette said, smiling even wider.

Lafayette left soon after, and his spot was replaced by Maria, “Alex, I want you to know that while we won’t go spreading rumors, if either the King or his ward directly question us, we will have to tell them about John. They’re the only ones, and the Prince, who we cannot lie to about this - so don’t worry if any of the candidates or council talk to us. We’re strong enough to keep quiet.”

Gouverneur and Edward joined Maria on the bed, and nodded along.

“Guys, thank you, really. I just, I don’t know how to handle the John situation right now, but I do appreciate you telling me this. I don’t think we’re technically breaking any rules though, if something were to happen, right?”

Edward responded, “No, not technically. There have been Kings with more than one consort before, and they were known to let their consorts play with each other, if you wanna phrase it like that. It wouldn’t do to forbid such a thing from the start.”

“Huh, okay then. Uh, could you guys tell me what you think about the entire situation? I know that you three know more about this than I do.”

Gouverneur laughed and said, “Well Alex, I don’t know what you’ve done, and neither does anyone else, but you’ve managed to catch the King’s attentions I think.”

“I haven’t even done anything though! I’ve seen him at meals, I had a conversation in the library, and then the dance - that’s it!”

His servant shrugged, “That’s the thing no one gets. You’ve had the same interactions with him as everyone else, less in the case of the higher born candidates, so I guess it’s just natural chemistry.”

Alex leaned further back into his pillows and groaned, “This is so complicated. I still haven’t figured out how much I want to be here.”

“Well, going home for the weekend will give you some time to think about it,” Maria said while patting his hand.

The week went by quickly, with everyone looking forward to going home. Lafayette didn’t make mention of the fact that he’d be joining Alex, so he didn’t bring it up either, and talked with the others about how weird it’d be to go back to his apartment after spending so much time in the palace.

John acted as if nothing had happened after the ball, and Alex followed his example. Every accidental brush of skin now held a certain weight, and Alex noticed how John’s gaze would occasionally linger. Ben seemed to pick up on the fact that something had changed, but if he was curious, he didn’t ask Alex.

The weirdest part about packing for the weekend was that nothing he was bringing with him was really his - it was a new suitcase, new clothing, and new toiletries all provided and taken care of by Maria, Edward, and Gouverneur.

Lafayette filled the car ride with meaningless chatter, switching between French and English. The other man had been hoping he could take place of the palace guard, but instead there were two men in uniform joining them. Alex wasn’t sure how they’d all fit, but they’d make it work.

Seeing Lafayette and the guards holding their luggage standing in the tiny living room of the apartment he shared with Hercules was one of the most ridiculous things Alex had seen. They

looked so out of place, in their bearing and in their clothing.

Hercules wasn't back yet, so Alex put his luggage in his room, and had the others put theirs in the corner to be dealt with later.

Sitting on the couch with a sigh, he looked at Lafayette and said, "So, what do you think?"

Lafayette sat down next to him, "Well, I don't know what I expected. It looks similar to most student apartments - don't forget I did go to college, I'm not completely unfamiliar. There's a lot more paper and fabric than I remember seeing though."

Alex laughed, "Yeah, that's Herc - you'll meet him when he gets back from class, I think you guys will get along if we can get passed the awkwardness of being a stranger, and a member of the royal family at that."

"What does this Hercules look like?"

Alex pointed to a picture on the wall, "That's him and me when we first moved into our dorm together freshman year - his mom framed it and sent it to us, and we thought it was funny and hung it up. We've kept it since we still live together, kind of."

Lafayette stood and walked over to the picture, and then turned to Alex with wide eyes, "Your roommate is very attractive, do you think we could keep my position in the palace a little secret, between us?"

"Wait what, why?"

Lafayette smiled, "You can't be the only one with a mind full of romance, Alexander."

"So you want me to lie to him?"

"Not lie, just omit. It doesn't matter that much, anyway - I'll only be here for the weekend, let a boy dream."

"Uh-huh"

As bizarre as it was, there was a lot of comfort in being able to walk around the small kitchen and make instant hot chocolate in his favorite mug. Lafayette stood across from him, and was talking about how weird it had been to go to college and have so many people not know who he was and treat him like an actual human being.

"I've missed this, I think that was part of the reason I wanted to come."

Alex nodded, "I think I can get that."

Hercules knew that Alex was coming back for the weekend, but he didn't know when, and he didn't know he was bringing people with him, so Hercules opened the door as he normally did, and threw his bag in the seat that one of the guards was sitting in, and turned into the kitchen, only to freeze when he saw the people standing there.

Alex placed his mug down, seeing Lafayette do the same from the corner of his eye, and opened his arms, "Herc! It's been too long, my man!"

He found himself being suffocated and lifted off the ground as Hercules said, "Alex, dude, I've missed you so much! I thought I'd like not having your sorry ass sitting on the couch at four in the

morning typing loud enough to wake the people five rooms over - but I was so wrong.”

Alex squeezed back as hard as he could, “I’ve missed you too - I don’t know how I’ve been surviving without you, honestly. Like, the palace is great and everything, but it’s so formal and stuffy and I can’t have my computer and it’s a mess.”

Hercules set him down, “Aw, you can’t jump or climb on people who are annoying you anymore, can you? That must be terrible, and not writing 24/7, and actually sleeping? The horror. I’m sure it’s pure torture.”

And that was when Hercules looked up and saw Lafayette, leaning against the counter and drinking his hot chocolate, “Uh, hello.”

Alex hadn’t seen his roommate look so dazed since they were playing hide-and-seek and he got up from out under a table too quickly and whacked his head.

It wasn’t just the daze of confusion - Hercules had always been one to fall hard and fall fast, and apparently Lafayette was just his type. Hercules’ eyes only got wider when Lafayette said, “You must be Hercules, Alex has told me so much about you! I am Lafayette, but you can call me Laf.”

Hercules was enchanted, and they’d only been in the same room for about two minutes. Lafayette seemed to enjoy the attention, and Alex wondered if that was because Lafayette was a flirt, he found Hercules attractive, or if he enjoyed it because Hercules didn’t know who he was. Alex couldn’t blame him if that was the case.

Alex ruined their moment, “C’mon guys, the kitchen’s small, let’s go in the living room or something.”

He was amused to see Lafayette sit closer to Hercules than necessary, but made no comment. The guards must have heard them moving, because they walked out of whatever corner they were hiding in and went to stand by the door.

Hercules turned to Alex, “Who are they and why are they here?”

Alex shrugged and turned to Lafayette who said, “Oh yes, those are the palace guards - we couldn’t let Alex return home for the weekend without an escort, and as I decided to join him we were assigned two.”

“Alrighty then,” Hercules then turned to Lafayette, “Okay, so who exactly are you? Like, why are you here? Not that I mind, I’m just wondering why you’ve decided to grace us with your presence.”

Lafayette chuckled, “Like I said before, I’m Lafayette. I’ve been running the Selection for the King, if that’s how you want to describe my position. I’ve become close to Alex and a couple of the other candidates. I’ve visited with Laurens before, and I figured Alex would be more fun to go home with than Ben, since he’ll just be visiting with his family.”

Hercules accepted that as an answer, and they spent the rest of the evening catching up and ordered in pizza for dinner, much to Alex and Lafayette’s delight.

“Do you know how long it’s been since I’ve had delivery pizza - the kitchen staff tries, but it’s just not the same. I once ordered it, and not only did security freak out about it, but George yelled at me because apparently pizza doesn’t fit into the healthy lifestyle he insists we all keep.”

Alex finished chewing his bite of pizza, “Wait, he’s some sort of health freak? That’s it, I can’t do

this anymore. I've barely survived the past couple of weeks without this, I don't think I can live the rest of my life out like that."

Lafayette laughed, "Nope, sorry, you're not allowed to leave. And I wouldn't call him a health freak, he has quite the sweet tooth, but so long of growing up on palace fair does leave you used to a certain diet."

"Who's George?" Hercules asked.

Alex waited until he went to take a drink of his soda, "Oh, the King."

Hercules choked, and Alex laughed while Lafayette slapped Hercules on the back, "C'mon Hercules, you're fine."

When he stopped choking, Hercules asked, "Why do you call the King George? Who are you?"

Lafayette smiled, "I am Lafayette, and George adopted me when I was young."

"You're Prince Gilbert?"

Lafayette nodded, looking tense. He relaxed again when Hercules said, "Huh, you're shorter in person."

Soon the pizza was finished, and they were all tired, and Alex realized a problem. "Uh, Laf, where are you planning on sleeping? I'd ask the guards too, but I'm not entirely convinced they're capable of such a thing."

The two men at the door chuckled and one said, "We're fine on the floor - we'll take shifts. Thank you for the consideration, sir."

Alex nodded, but continued to stare at Lafayette, "Your options are the floor, the sofa, or sharing a bed with one of us."

Lafayette turned and stroked Hercules' cheek with a finger, "You know, if I knew you just an hour longer, I'd love to join you. However, tonight I shall bunk with our dearest Alexander, and you shall have to wait until tomorrow."

They walked away, leaving Hercules standing in the living room in shock.

"Laf, I think you broke him."

Alex felt an arm wrap around his shoulders, and Laf leaned down to whisper in his ear, "Wonderful, I'm hoping that before I leave he'll break me, if you know what I mean"

"Oh my god. You've known him for like five hours maybe, and as much as he might want to - and trust me, I think he does - he's too romantic for that. And I'm not gonna let you hurt him like that. You're a prince, Laf. I don't think he sees an actual relationship as all that realistic, and I'm sure he thinks the same thing."

Alex leaned down to fish around for a toothbrush in the bag that had been packed for him, listening as Lafayette said, "I can't make any promises, because you're right, I haven't known him long enough to make up my mind. I see what you're saying. And you're trying to marry the King, I don't think you can tell me who can and cannot marry into the royal family."

"If you want to honestly pursue a relationship with Hercules, and I mean honestly, I could come around to supporting it. I think you'd be a good fit, in a way. But I also know that it comes with a

lot of responsibility”

When he came back in from the bathroom, he found Lafayette laying on the bed wearing pajamas. Laf looked over at him as he changed into his own and said, “It is much too soon to think about these things, but in my position I guess I have to. I’ll tell you if anything happens.”

It was weird crawling into a bed with Lafayette. He’d spent so long sleeping alone except for the odd encounter or two, and he wasn’t really all that close to the other man. Alex’s bed at the palace was much more comfortable from an objective standpoint, but the familiarity of the lumpy mattress meant that he drifted off soon after his head hit the pillow.

Alex woke up to find Lafayette draped over the top of him, snoring into his neck. The part of him that took comfort in physical contact was delighted, the part of him that really had to go to the bathroom was much less so.

The day was saved by Hercules walking into his room with two cups of coffee, “I thought you were going after the King.”

Alex groaned, “I am - but apparently this one is a cuddler. This is terrible, I have to pee, Hercules save me.”

No saving was necessary, because either their voices or the smell of the coffee woke Lafayette up, and Hercules blushed when a wink was thrown his way.

“Sorry about that, you musn’t tell George, he’ll become terribly jealous.”

They all laughed, and that set the tone for the day. It went by much quicker than Alex would have preferred. They walked around, and spent some time in a coffee shop updating each other on everything that had happened. They wouldn’t have gotten a table to sit at on a Saturday morning, but the guards were helpful in that regard, even if it meant that looks and cameras were being thrown their way.

Hercules wasn’t surprised at Lafayette saying that Alex seemed to be one of the King’s favorites so far, and Alex was happy to hear that Hercules was managing himself quite well.

Being back made Alex realize that he didn’t really have that much to miss. He missed Ben and John, even with the mess that was the other’s feelings, more than he missed any of the people here excluding Hercules.

The entire weekend was spent talking, and Lafayette made due on his promise to spend his second night with Hercules, and confessed to Alex in the morning that nothing had happened, to his disappointment. The two’s personalities had clicked in the weirdest way, and Alex found himself happy for them.

He found himself becoming closer to Lafayette too. Seeing the other in a casual setting had lowered a barrier Alex hadn’t realized existed.

Hercules sent them both off with hugs, and a reminder to Alex to write more.

The first half of the ride back to the palace was spent with Alex and Lafayette leaning against each other, catching up on sleep they had missed talking late into the night with Hercules. One of the guards woke them up when there were two hours left, as Lafayette had asked.

“Hey, Alex, do you think that if I were to write Hercules, he’d write back?”

Alex was surprised, but pleased, “I think he’d love that. Why don’t you just text him though? Or call?”

“There’s something much more romantic about a handwritten letter, don’t you think?”

Chapter 13

George Washington once again found himself sitting in the council chambers. He stared down the length of table and met all the councilmembers' eyes, and waited for one of them to break the silence.

It was Adams, of course, "Your Majesty, I believe it is time we officially meet to discuss the candidates. You recently made the move to send home half of the Chosen, without consulting us, might I add. While there is nothing to be done about that now, we find ourselves wanting to know what the current standings are and what your next move will be."

The others nodded their agreement.

George folded his hands on top of the table and said, "I believe I shall start with Jefferson, since I believe he is your candidate."

Adams flushed, for George's tone could barely pass as neutral.

"He is a fine young man - intelligent and well-mannered in my company. He comes from a good family, and has a great many connections. I cannot send him away this early, but I promise you he will not be named consort."

George took a sick pleasure in watching Adams' face twist, "Your Majesty, it is simply too early to make that sort of decision!"

George raised his hand, "Calm yourself, Adams. In most cases I would agree with you - I have not spent enough time with any of these young men to decide if I want to marry them. However, in the case of Jefferson, I am more than certain. I am sure you've noticed he looks similar to Lafayette - far too similar for my own comfort."

Adams looked as if he had swallowed a bitter lemon, and the others in the room looked smug.

Lord Schuyler broke the silence, "And what about the other candidates, your Majesty?"

"Lord Burr is the perfect spouse by every popular definition, but I find him far too perfect to be a good companion for myself. Laurens is a lovely young man, who shares connections that are almost equal to Jefferson's. I don't believe I'd despise a future with him, but nor do I think I would look forward to waking every day as I wish to."

Everyone nodded, as no single man was attached to either candidate.

Schuyler spoke again, "And what about Tallmadge, if I may ask? I find myself curious what you think?"

"Ben shows promise. He's one of the few that I find myself wanting to know more about, to see if I genuinely find myself attracted to him - on a deeper level, not just superficially. There's potential there, and it's something I would like to explore."

Schuyler smiled, looking pleased with himself.

Another voice called out, "And what about Benedict Arnold?"

"Arnold is interesting. I haven't managed to get much out of him. He holds himself different than

the others do, and there seems to be a lot he's hiding under the surface. I just have yet to decide if what's hidden underneath is something that I want to explore. I'll observe him a bit more before deciding, I think."

There was another round of nods. Arnold hadn't gotten that much publicity, as the photographer had commented when interviewed that he seemed a bit gruff, and he wasn't as photogenic as the others. He was far from a public favorite, and that sentiment was held by those closer to the situation.

The King looked around the room before settling on Von Steuben, who said, "Are you saving the best for last, your Majesty?"

George chuckled, "You're awfully proud of Hamilton, aren't you?"

The baron nodded, a smirk gracing his lips.

"Well, your Hamilton is an intelligent and beautiful young man, as are the others. He has no connections or wealth, similar to Tallmadge. I will admit that while I obviously have not decided anything as of yet, he has caught my attention in the way the others haven't. He feels comfortable speaking his mind, and that's something I admire."

According to Von Steuben, Adams had taken offense to Hamilton's presence from the start, on the basis he wasn't qualified, so it was unsurprising when the man spoke up, "What do you mean he's comfortable speaking his mind? That's hardly an acceptable trait in a consort - what if he were to ruin a relation or alliance because he said something the other party disagreed with?"

George was silent for a moment before answering, "I personally enjoy talking to someone who isn't afraid to hide what he thinks - honestly is something I feel like I'm not treated to regularly enough, and it's refreshing to hear. And you're thinking very far ahead, Lord Adams. What not to say in certain peoples' company is something that is learned, and if the boy is indeed chosen, he will simply have to be taught. And from what little time I've spent with him, I don't imagine he'd be all that resistant to new knowledge."

Friedrich smiled at him from across the table.

And then Lord Greene cleared his throat, "Now that talk of the candidates is done with, I'm afraid we have some unfortunate news to share with you. I'm sure you were wondering why a full meeting was called to discuss such things, and it's because that wasn't the meeting's main purpose."

The King's shoulders straightened, "Then was is the meeting's main purpose, Lord Greene?"

Not a single man in the room appeared as if he would like to answer, but eventually Knox spoke up, "The crown prince was fulfilling his duty in the military, despite his complaints. He occupied a safe position, as it wouldn't do for him to actually see action, following his late mother's wishes. She was always against him being sent out, but tradition is tradition."

"What are you telling me, Lord Knox. I doubt you're here to give me a simple update on his location."

Lord Knox sighed and said, "There was a mix-up of some sort, I believe - bad information. The base Jack was situated at encountered some issues."

George's teeth were clenched, and his knuckles were white from how tight his hands were gripping each other, "What kind of issues, Lord Knox, I demand that you speak plainly. We served together,

you know that I am not unfamiliar with what happens in the military.”

“Jackie found himself victim to a bomb that went off. It was somehow snuck in with supplies. He was sleeping when it went off, according to reports.”

The King froze in his chair, his chest not moving for he was taking in no breaths.

A moment passed, and the King took in a breath, and said, “You’ve called this meeting to inform me that my son is dead, hiding it beneath a layer of questions about the candidates for the damned Selection you’ve forced me into.”

Adams made himself known, “He’s not really your son, your Majesty.”

George slammed his fist on the table, “Just because I did not share blood or DNA with the boy does not make him any less my son. I took him in, I raised the boy, I named him as my own in every way that mattered. He may not have been the perfect son, by popular definition, but in my heart I saw him as mine. I know you never liked him, Lord Adams, you’ve always said he wasn’t the right man to put on the throne. I always thought the two of you were rather similar.”

The King could see that Lord Adams didn’t know how to react to the comment, and he took pleasure in watching the man swallow down whatever response he might have had and sit back with a pinched expression across his features.

The council was silent. The King was a calm and collected man, on most occasions. They couldn’t blame him for his outburst, but neither were they prepared to deal with it.

Lord Duportail made the attempt, “Your Majesty, we are very sorry for your loss.”

George raised a stiff hand into the air, “You’re all dismissed.”

Ten minutes later, when only the King and Von Steuben remained in the room, George sat back into his chair, and dropped his face to his hands.

The Baron was silent. Friedrich had seen George in many states - had been there for him when he lost his brother, - but that did not make it any more simple for Friedrich to comfort George in the wake of such news.

The King said nothing, and neither did the Baron.

George could feel emotion rise in his chest, thoughts swirled in his mind, and his stomach spun as he struggled with the news.

Jack was dead. He’d never get to see one of his smiles, or hear one of his many complaints. The boy was never the most graceful, and George had always found amusement in watching his son stumble around the balls he had been forced to attend. The crown prince was a catch, but the ladies were often much less enthused when they realized the boy could barely count out a waltz.

He remembered the hours spent whispering in Martha’s ear as they’d watch him attempt to hold conversations with the girls in their beautiful gowns. There’d been a time when Jackie had been enamoured with Philip’s oldest daughter.

George had found it a struggle not to laugh as Jackie walked away dejected after some no doubt cutting remark made by Angelica. There had been a part of him that told him to feel bad for his son, but even George knew that Angelica’s wit was difficult to match.

Jackie had never been the most brilliant - never quite able to summon the diligence and work ethic required to make it through the subjects he found more difficult. He didn't need to be brilliant in every way though, he just needed to know enough to fulfill his role. Even the most vacant of people would remember something after hearing it repeated day in and day out for their entire life.

The King was a mostly ceremonial role, and Jackie didn't need to be the best. Jackie just need to be there.

But he wasn't, and he never would be.

Most of the council preferred it that way. They had always thought that Jackie was too weak-willed, and had been too coddled by his mother throughout his childhood to become any sort of great man. George had always listened, but he'd always think back to how they were all raised - and how their children were all raised.

It was all the same. Every heir and heiress was coddled beyond belief. It was only the remarkable ones with a drive all of their own that seemed to separate themselves from the rest; ladies like Angelica Schuyler who were able to go above and beyond.

The King was distracted from his thoughts when Von Steuben said, "Now, I know this probably isn't the best time to say this, but we need to look ahead. You know how quickly these things happen. You need to get Lafayette ready."

George didn't remove his face from his hands, "I'll tell Lafayette soon, but I must deal with it on my own first. Besides, Lafayette is fine as he is now. If the Selection goes through, and we don't send them all away, whoever is chosen will be made to lead before Gilbert if I were to pass."

"Whoever you choose. The stakes are much higher, aren't they - with Jackie off the table."

The King raised his head as realization started to sink in, "I'm no longer going to be able to fight off their questioning. Each and every single decision I make is going to need to be explained, with evidence cited. This isn't just a game of who has the prettiest smile anymore, is it? Either we pick someone who is sweet and malleable - and let you all take control, which is preferable for the council. Or I pick someone with his own intelligence and ability, someone who could actually step into my place and not drown or let himself be manipulated. This isn't just picking a consort, this is picking the next King. I'm not old, but neither am I young. It may never be something I have to worry about, and if they so wished, they could choose to not take the position and pass the title over to Lafayette. But as much as the people love Lafayette, there will still be some pushback, for he is not my son."

Von Steuben met his gaze straight on, "Neither was Jackie."

"You, the council, this was on purpose, wasn't it."

"How do you mean?"

George narrowed his eyes, "The timing. You didn't have to start the selection right after my official mourning period ended - no one would have questioned it. I knew that, but I chose to see how it played out. And now I find myself regretting that decision."

"I was not the one who called for it, but I did play along."

"Do you know who did?"

"Not for certain," Von Steuben frowned, "but you know how these games are played."

The King straightened in his seat, “Do you think it possible that Jackie’s death was planned?”

“Anything is possible.”

“The title would go straight to Lafayette, there’d be no need for the Selection. Why do they want a consort?”

Von Steuben leaned his elbows onto the table, “A consort has the potential to be controlled, Lafayette does not. And they’d simply raise a fuss until they got their way.”

George nodded, “I don’t like this, but you’re right. I have funeral arrangements to plan, and I need time to gather my thoughts. Not only is my son dead, but the tensions are about to increase.”

“Well, I’m sure you could choose any of the young men residing in the palace to work off that tension if you so desire.”

The King stood, and glared at his friend, “Now is not the time. You are dismissed.”

The Baron bowed, and walked out of the chambers, leaving the King standing alone staring at his hands spread out on the table.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Note the change in rating

The candidates all gathered for dinner after returning to the palace, and they all took note of the tense atmosphere.

Alex hadn't seen Lafayette since they arrived.

After the last of the food was cleared away, an unfamiliar woman walked into the dining room, cleared her throat, and said, "The Crown Prince was the victim of a bombing incident, and the King and his ward will be away for the next two weeks. You are directed to carry on as normal until they return."

The woman left without another word, leaving the six candidates unsure of how to proceed. John was the first one who stood, and Ben and Alex followed him into the parlor.

They all sat down on their couch, and John whispered, "You know, with Jack dead, that means the consort position is suddenly a lot more important."

Ben turned to look at John, "What do you mean?"

"If the King were to have something happen to him or if he chose to step down, and anyone raised a fuss about Lafayette taking over, the crown would go to the consort."

John couldn't be serious, but judging by how serious Jefferson and Burr were looking over in their corner of the room, he had to be.

John continued, "I expect that after everything is taken care of, and the Selection starts up again, the King is going to start seriously getting to know all of us. Be expected to speak politics, and be prepared to explain exactly how you think and make decisions. Of course, the King may have already made up his mind, even with this news. Just know that it's not just a lifetime of luxury we're competing for anymore, but potential responsibility and the training that goes into that."

Ben didn't say anything, and Alex followed his example with a nod.

If he wanted to stay, it couldn't just be for the sake of competition anymore. Frederickson didn't matter. This was something he had to figure out on his own, possibly taking Lafayette and the King into consideration. Alex knew he had no say in this, really, but if Von Steuben was speaking the truth - he had to start thinking ahead.

Of course, the silence wasn't meant to last, and Jefferson called from across the room, "Hey, Hamilton, you saw Lafayette last."

Arnold snorted, and Alex looked up to stare at Jefferson, "Yeah, why? We got here and then he went off to do whatever he needed to."

Jefferson stood and walked across the room until he was standing two feet away from Alex, "Did

he say anything? I mean, you're awfully close now, aren't you? I don't imagine he'd keep any secrets from you."

"I don't appreciate the implication," Alex said, back straightening, "but no, he didn't. I don't think he was told about the situation until he got back to his chambers to unpack. I had to follow the same rules as you did about no communications with the palace while away, and I think they extended to Laf."

Jefferson raised a brow, "Oh, he's Laf now? He's going to be crown prince, now that Jack's gone, but I'm sure you knew that. It's always good to have a backup plan, right? I mean, there's no guarantee you're going to get the King, so might as well settle for the Prince instead."

Alex found himself filling with anger, and he stood, and found his face level with Jefferson's neck. He was soon joined by John. Alex went to take a step forward, but found a hand grabbing his wrist. Alex looked back, and saw that it was Ben, pulling him and John back to sit down on the sofa.

He went as directed, but his anger didn't fade, "Well, it must be a shame that the only way you could imagine a relationship being formed or success being obtained is with sex. I've gotten as far as I have with my brains and wit alone. There have been times when granting certain favors might have been helpful, but I never did it, because in the end I never needed to. That's not going to change now, Jefferson."

Jefferson's top lip pulled back, "You honestly expect me to believe that a pretty boy like you with no name or title actually has the right to be here? To be anywhere? Even if you were some kind of genius, you don't have anything to stand on. I know the type of men that are in charge of the places you're trying to get into, and frankly they don't care if you're the next Einstein or if you're dumber than a box of rocks - all that matters is what they get by giving you what you want. And the truth is, Hamilton, you're offering nothing."

Ben's grip was the only thing holding Alex back, and looking closer he could see that Burr had a fist in the back of Jefferson's shirt. It wouldn't look good on any of them if they were to get into a physical altercation, especially during such a stressful time for the royal family.

Alex could see that Jefferson wanted to keep goading him into action, he could see that Jefferson wanted nothing more than for Alex to punch him just like he deserved so that he could raise a fuss.

That was the only thing that kept Alex from fighting his way out of Ben's hold.

He sat back into the sofa, and when Jefferson started to move away Alex called out, "You might be right, you might be wrong - you certainly know this illustrious system better than I do. But I can't help but think that you're projecting. I mean, if you strip away your own name, what do you have left? You're not sure that you could get the same places I have if we switched positions, and that bothers you, more than anything else - the possibility that I might actually be better than you."

Alex watched as Jefferson's shoulders tensed beneath his shirt, and found himself a little disappointed when the man followed Burr's direction and moved to sit down as if Alex had never said a thing.

The room was still tense, but it was difficult to tell how much of it was the tension that filled the palace and how much was caused by the altercation.

John rested his hand on Alex's back, and leaned into Alex's side.

No one was willing to break the silence, and everyone was left to their thoughts.

The next two weeks passed similarly. Alex went out into the garden on occasion, with John a constant presence and Ben trailing behind the two of them.

It seemed as if John was no longer willing to act as if nothing had happened the night after the ball. He didn't bring it up in conversation, but his touches become more common and more confident. Alex played along, not pushing him away, but never leaning into them or encouraging them. He'd stay neutral, and see how it played out.

At dinner, the same woman from before came in and told them that the King and Prince were to return that evening, and that the King would be taking private meals with each of them starting in the morning.

On his way out of the room, the woman had caught his attention to say, "Mr. Hamilton, you will be having breakfast with the King, per his request."

Alex had nodded his response, and continued on his way. John had been close enough to hear, but he made no comment on the walk back to their chambers.

He was greeted with Maria's smiling face when he made his way into his room, and Alex smiled back. It was the simple joys that made a world of difference. He knew that he could rely on Ben and John, but it was difficult to make carefree conversation with so much hanging in the air of the palace. His chambers offered a sort of reprieve from the tension, and Alex had learned to treasure it.

Maria stepped forward to help him with his shirt, it was rather intimate and there was always a part of Alex that wanted to lean in and see just what the smile that always played on the corners of her lips promised, but he refrained.

"Gouverneur has readied your bath. We know that your presence has been requested tomorrow by the King, so he has added some extra bath oils to the water, which we all know are a secret pleasure of yours. Take the opportunity to relax, you'll feel much better in the morning."

Alex smiled and made his way into the bathroom, where the bath was indeed waiting for him. The steam was rising from the water, filling the room with the smell of the oils - a combination that Gouverneur had assured him would make any man flock to him if he so much as flipped his hair.

He wasn't so sure about that, but he enjoyed the scent, so he let it be.

He got into the water, and soon Gouverneur's hands found their way into his hair, and Edward started working his hands and arms. His nails had been kept in perfect condition, but his wrists were sore from writing, so he appreciated the routine nonetheless.

Alex stayed in the water until it got cold, taking the time to rest. His mind was not swirling with thoughts about the possibilities of the future for once, and he was basking in the peace. His fingers and toes were pruned when he stood up and accepted the robe Edward put on his shoulders. Gouverneur put some more oils in his hair, which would be allowed to air dry for the night before being styled in the morning.

He didn't notice the knock, or when Maria went to open it, but he did notice when John stood before him, Maria saying, "Sorry sir, he was very determined to come in."

Alex looked up, "Hello."

John smiled back, and stared at Alex, taking in his dripping hair and fluffy robe, "Hey."

When Alex doesn't say anything, John moves to sit next to Alex on the bed and said, "Alex, you know I have feelings for you. I'm not going to become consort - I'm not stupid enough to delude myself. But there's something I want to do before I leave, and if I do it, I imagine I'll be leaving sooner rather than later."

Alex had a feeling where this was going, and a quick look to Maria told him she did as well. Maria went to close the curtains, and Gouverneur sent him a questioning look and then gestured toward the door - asking if Alex wanted him to take John out.

He met John's gaze, "What do you mean?"

"Alex," John said smiling, leaning forward, "can I have one night with you? Don't do anything you don't want to do - you can even use me as a way to take the edge off, it's awfully hard to find time for yourself when you're constantly catered to by servants. I don't think you love me, but I like to think you could. Think of it as a test run, perhaps. If all your great plans don't work out, I'll always be there, after all of this. I know this is far from the normal way of doing things, but you're far from a normal person."

"I don't know."

John was right about one thing, he hadn't been able touch himself since here. The servants didn't sleep in the same room, but he was always too paranoid to start anything for fear that they'd walk in if they heard a mysterious sound.

Alex didn't have much time to think, as John soon leaned in and kissed him, with a hand going into his hair. It wasn't soft kiss, there was a hunger and desperation to it - as if John was realizing it might be his last chance.

When John pulled away, they were both panting, and Alex's hand rested on John's chest, "What about now?"

This was the last moment Alex could pull out. If he leaned in toward the lips he found his eyes focusing on, he couldn't pretend he didn't know where the night would lead. If he continued to lean in, he would wake up to find himself wrapped in John's arms.

If he stopped himself, and told John to leave, he would. There would be an awkwardness there, and it would be difficult to continue any relationship after they parted ways. The smarter decision was to tell John to leave, to tell him that Alex was focusing on the King and the Selection.

Alex had never been the best at making spur-of-the-moment decisions.

He leaned forward, and tilted his head just so for the perfect angle. He took in John's look of surprise and small grin before he closed his eyes and savored the contact.

John tightened his grip in Alex's hair, and Alex let out a moan. Neither man noticed when the servants left the bedroom, too wrapped up in the sensations.

John pulled away, and his free hand moved to Alex's robe, the question in the man's eyes. Alex nodded, and sighed as John pushed the robe from his shoulders and John's hand was flat against the center of the chest, and pushed Alex back so he was lying on the bed.

Alex wrapped his arms around John's neck, and tilted his head back when John leaned down to kiss along his jaw and down his neck. He let out another moan when he felt John bit down and suck at the skin, hard enough to bruise.

John was still dressed, so Alex began to work at the buttons. John took it off, and pulled the t-shirt he had on underneath up over his head, and Alex's mouth found its way to John's collarbone, biting and licking his way down the freckles on John's chest.

Alex didn't get to follow the patterns for very long as he soon found himself being pushed back on the bed, and John's hand tracing along his side until it found itself at his hip. Alex pushed his hips against John's taut stomach, groaning when John pushed against him in response.

He could feel John's hot breath against his neck, and John's voice was a low whisper, "Alex, please, I want to taste you."

He frantically nodded, and moaned in anticipation as John kissed his way down his chest and stomach. Alex bit down at his lip when he felt John take him in hand, and looked down to find John staring up at him, mouth open.

Alex squeeze his eyes shut, and let out a nonsensical string of words when he felt the wet warmth surround him, "Oh, John, please please please, more, I, beautiful, oh my god."

His hand found its way into John's hair, and he looked down to find John's eyes closed as his head bobbed up and down.

He could feel the tension building, and he was no longer able to control the small motions of his hips, "John, I'm getting close."

John sucked harder, and Alex pushed his head back into the pillows as John swallowed around him.

John moved up the bed so that was was lying next to Alex, "You're beautiful, you know."

Alex shook his head, and rolled over so that he was lying halfway on top of John, "You should let me return the favor." He rested his hand on John's lower abdomen, right above the elastic band of his boxers.

"You don't have to."

Alex leaned up, and kissed John hard before pulling away, "What if I want to?"

John smiled, "Well, I'd be the last person to try and stop you."

He settled himself between John's legs, and pulled John's hard length out of his boxers, making eye contact as he kissed the leaking tip.

The sweetest whine escaped John's lips, and Alex smiled at the sound before wrapping his hand around John's cock and taking the head into this mouth.

Feeling the weight on his tongue and hearing the sounds leave John's lips was something Alex found himself enjoying, but he couldn't help but imagine what it'd be like to have the King in John's place.

John was muscular, but where he was lean the King was bulkier and radiated strength. How would his strong thighs feel under Alex's hands? The man's voice was deep and smooth, but would it become even deeper with arousal? What kind of noise would he make when he found his release?

His stream of thought was interrupted by John pulling hard at his hair and saying, "Alex, I'm gonna, I'm going to, ah," and Alex swallowed down the release.

John pulled him up, and kissed him hard, licking into his mouth, "You're amazing, you know."

Alex hummed, and enjoyed the slow slide of lips as they both found themselves fading, "Are you going to go back to your own chambers, or stay until the morning?"

"What do you think I should do."

He sighed, and rolled onto his back, "I want you to stay, but I think you should go."

John's face became blank, and he stared at the ceiling. When he spoke again, his voice was cold, "Of course. I'll see you tomorrow."

John sat up, but before he could move to get out of the bed, Alex grabbed his arm and pulled him down, kissed him once softly, and said, "I really don't want you to, but you know as well as I do that people will talk - the servants. I trust mine, but they won't be the only ones to know if you walk out of here in the morning. This is a risk in itself. There might not be any rules against it, but you know as well as I do that the council is willing to get vicious if they don't think they're getting their way."

"You're really in this to win it, aren't you?"

Alex shook his head, "I'm still not sure. I don't know. It's hard. I didn't want to do this at first, but I'm happy I did - even if I end up finding myself laughed out of the palace, because it means that I'll have met you."

"You really want to try to make this work?", John asked with hope overwhelming his voice.

John's eyes were dangerous, and Alex found himself melting in the other man's gaze and agreeing, "Of course."

John leaned in to kiss him again, before standing up and putting on his shirt, all while smiling. He blew Alex a kiss before walking out of the door, leaving Alex sitting alone in his bed, regretting everything.

How could he give John false hope when he was picturing a man he had yet to begin to know in his place?

Chapter 15

Alex woke up the next morning to the weight of his servants' silent judgement as they went about their usual morning tasks. Another bath was drawn, and the usual small talk was absent as he soaked in the warm water and oils.

Sitting in his robe in front of the mirror while Maria worked on his hair, he could see the bruise that John left on his neck the night before clear as day. It served as the bright reminder that he had made a decision that could turn into a mistake, and that there was no running from it.

He met Maria's eyes in the mirror and asked, "Do you think I fucked up?"

Her eyes widened with surprise, and he could see Edward look up from where he was arranging Alex's outfit for the day. She took a moment before responding, "Are you asking if I think you made a mistake, an in-depth explanation of my personal thoughts about your actions, or my predictions on how this might change some things here?"

He bit at his lip, "All of them, if that's okay."

She pulled the brush through his hair a couple of times, "Well, first thing: did you want to sleep with John?"

"Well, I didn't not want to."

Maria hummed, "That's fair." She continued to brush his hair, even though Alex was sure that there wasn't a single knot to be found. "Well, in that regard, I don't think you made a mistake. You could end up leaving the palace and forming a relationship with John, if you wanted to. But, I don't think you want to leave the palace."

Alex shook his head, "I don't think I do either."

"And that is where you made the mistake." Maria took in a short breath, "But, maybe it was sleeping with John that gave you that realization, I don't know. Maybe, you were still going back and forth, and the night with John made you realize that you really want to become consort. I only know of you what I've observed, which is more than most, but still not enough."

"So what are your personal thoughts?"

"I think that maybe you should have turned John away when given the chance, but I also know you've probably been a little sexually frustrated and needed that. Technically, the three of us are here to do with as you please, in all ways. I took this position knowing that you very well might end up taking me to your bed, as did Edward and Gouverneur. If all you were seeking was release, you didn't need to go to John to find it, so I think that was stupid of you. But if you needed more than that - the genuine affection, or a realization, then I guess you did what you needed to do."

Alex sighed as Maria's fingers took the place of the brush, "I think I did need more than just the sex, to be honest. And Maria, while you're absolutely beautiful and anyone would be blessed to have you in that manner, I'm afraid that I don't think I could. Even if you were to come to me begging, I don't think I could entirely believe you were there of your free will. Like you said, it's part of your position, and that's not a fair one."

She leaned down and kissed his cheek, "Is that not how it would be with the King?"

“I suppose you’re right. Though, I do like to imagine that if I were chosen it would be on a basis of mutual respect. Equals, perhaps not in title, but at least in the trust we hold in the other.”

“You’re a bit of a romantic, aren’t you?”

Alex shrugged, “I guess I just might be.”

Maria started to work on his hair, styling it as usual.

Edward stood in front of him after helping him get dressed, and fiddled with his collar, “I don’t think there’s a way to hide that mark. Do you want one of us to try to cover it with makeup?”

“No,” Alex shook his head, “it’ll just get on the shirt.”

“I suppose you’re right. Now, since you won’t be eating breakfast here or with the candidates, you won’t be going to the parlor. I think the King will be having you in one of the small, private dining rooms. Would you prefer one of us or a guard to escort you down?”

“One of you, please.”

Gouverneur brought him to an unfamiliar set of doors, and brushed his fingers as encouragement before bowing, and left Alex to wait for his presence to be announced.

The doors are soon opened, and Alex walked in to find the King standing by the table with a smile on his face. The welcoming expression was unexpected, but Alex let himself find comfort in it. The King stepped forward, and took Alex’s hand before leaning down to press a kiss to it, “Good morning, Alexander. Thank you for taking the time to share a meal with me.”

He heard the doors close behind him, “It is my pleasure, your Majesty.”

They both took their seats, and after they were settled, the King said, “Now, I feel that since we’ve become more familiar with each other and it’s just us for the time being, we can dispense with formalities. Please, call me George.”

Alex stared at the servant pouring his coffee rather than meet the King’s eyes as he said, “I shall try my best, George.”

It felt weird to address the King by his first name, but the man’s smile at the sound made Alex want to say it again and again, until it became normal. The King had a beautiful smile. The one he wore in public was pleasant to look at, it was designed to be, but the one on his face right now was new - sweeter and softer somehow.

The King, George, took a sip of his water, “I know that Gilbert went with you for the weekend when you were all able to go home. I’ve heard his end of it, but how did it go for you?”

Alex smiled at the servant who placed a tray of fruit on the table, before he turned to George, “It was fun, actually. I mean, I got along with him from the start, but I didn’t expect that he’d want to spend an entire weekend with me. I’m happy he did though. It was nice to see him outside of the formality of the Selection. My roommate didn’t expect him though, which was funny. It was nice to catch up with him, and I think Laf and Herc got along really well, which was great.”

“Herc being your roommate?”

Alex nodded, “Yes! Hercules Mulligan, he was one of my first friends when I got here - freshman roommates - and we’ve been incredibly close ever since. I don’t actually know what I would have

done without him.”

He had seen the King eat before, but Alex still found something almost domestic in how George bit into his toast and brushed the crumbs off his lip as he focused on what Alex was saying. It was much more casual, and that made it both more and less comfortable.

“Did you know that Lord Adams, one of the council members, tried to tell me that you had no right to be here, and you must have granted some sort of sexual favor to Von Steuben for him to recommend you?”

Alex felt the anger rise in his chest, but he shoved it down as he bit into a piece of pineapple. He took a moment to chew and swallow the fruit before he said, “I did not know that. I expected something like that to come up. Not because any of it’s true, but just because I know that there’s a lot going on behind the scenes. Besides, I’m used to it.”

George nodded slowly, and peered over his cup of coffee, “Why are you used to it?”

“I’ve had to become used to it.” Alex took in a deep breath, “When I was little it was because people were judging my mom, and I had to deal with that. As I got older, it’s because I was too smart for my own good. When I got to college, people didn’t seem to want to believe I managed to make my way there myself.”

“But you did, and once you got there, you made it your goal to try to worm your way to an actual position so you can make a difference - even though the entire world is standing against you telling that’s impossible.”

Alex looked down at his coffee, tracing his finger along the handle of the mug, “That about sums me up, sir.”

The King’s voice was sharp when he said, “Don’t call me sir, at least not in this setting. Now, you know that a young man I considered my son died.”

Alex startled, this was not where he expected the conversation to go, but he nodded and waited for the King to continue.

“You were required to sign up for the Selection, and Friedrich brought you here, to me. You want to actually do something. Before, the title would have just been a way for you to form connections. Most people haven’t done that much with it, but I think you would have managed to propel yourself forward from there, and you would have had my support. Now, it’s different. You’d be next in line for the throne. Technically second, but if a single person were to raise a fuss about Gilbert not being my son by blood, the crown would go to you. You would have all the power you’ve dreamed of - you’d be in the position you told me I should fully accept in our first meeting.”

Alex’s leg was shaking, but he met the King’s eyes, unblinking, “Everything you said is accurate, but you know that. Why are you telling me this? There are five other men out there, probably worrying over when they’re going to meet with you again. Is this a test? A promise? A warning?”

George took a sip of his coffee, set the mug down, and stared back at Alex. The King’s stillness that Alex had admired before was present, and it wasn’t until that moment that Alex realized the man had been relaxed up until then.

“I’m not sure what it is, but it’s something I needed to say. What would you do if I were to tell you that it was a promise - that we are going to walk out of this room together, side by side, and into

the parlor to announce that you've been chosen? What would you say?"

Alex's left hand fisted in the fabric of his pants, and the other went up to run through his hair. His eyes went to the servants standing along the wall as he thought of something to say, missing the King's narrowed eyes as he caught a glimpse of the bruise on Alex's neck.

Moments passed, and then Alex clasped his hands together in his lap and met the King's gaze once more, "Well George, I'd tell you that I haven't quite made up my mind if I even want to be your Consort. And then I would stand up, and wait for you to escort me out into the parlor so we could share the happy news."

The King's brows raised, and his eyes gained intensity, "Do you not know if you want to be my consort, or do you not know if you want the title at all? And even with that doubt, you'd still do it, wouldn't you?"

"The title. And yes, I would. I imagine we'd find time to sit down and discuss at length exactly what it would mean for both of us, and who and what would be affected, and then I'd make my decision after being presented with all of the information. If I chose to refuse the title, you could spin the story however you might wish, and I would most likely leave with quite the mark on my reputation, and you'd be able to find someone else."

"And what if I didn't want anyone else."

Alex let himself smile, "Well, then I guess you'd have to fight for me."

George had not expected that answer, and his smile was both surprised and pleased. The next five minutes or so passed with no words being spoken, only grins and glances being exchanged as they both ate the meal that was laid out before them on the table.

Alex finished his cup of coffee, and sat back and watched as a servant refilled it. Once it was full, he took another sip and then said, "I'm sure I must be going soon, as you no doubt have a very busy day ahead of you. But, I must ask, have you made your decision? Or was that only a figurative situation?"

The King leaned forward, and rested an elbow on the table, "I do have quite a full schedule these next upcoming days, but anything else is a rarity. I may have made up my mind, perhaps not. Either way, I'm not going to announce it. If I did, the council would be very upset with me, and we can't be having that."

He set down his almost full cup, smiled and stood up, "I don't want to make you late for anything, your Majesty. I should get going now, don't you think?"

The King nodded, and Alex turned to leave, but before he could get very far he felt a hand around his wrist, "I thought I told you to call me George?"

Alex swallowed, "You did."

"Now it is my turn to ask a question."

Alex went in the direction he was pulled in, and found himself standing in front of the King, with the man's hand still around his wrist. "And what is your question, George?"

"Might I kiss you, Alexander?"

Alex nodded, and watched as George stood up and placed his free hand on the side of Alex's face

before tilting his head and leaning down until their lips barely brushed. Alex stood on his tiptoes and pushed forward to make it a proper kiss.

The King's lips were softer than expected, and the hands on his wrist and face provided Alex with just the right amount of comfort and support. George pulled back, and he opened his eyes to find George staring right at him.

Alex moved his arm up around George neck, and tilted his face upwards, asking for another kiss. He got what he wanted, and he soon found himself being walked backwards until his back was pressed against a wall.

The hand against his face moved up to tangle in his hair, ruining Maria's efforts, and George's tongue licked at the seam of his lips. He moaned into the other man's mouth, and was rewarded by the King pressing further into him.

Soon, they parted for air, both men taking in large breaths. George's hand released his wrist, and started to trace the contours of his lips, "I've been wanting to do that since the first moment I saw you."

"Why didn't you?"

The King's pupils were blown wide, and Alex took pride and pleasure in knowing he was the one who put that look in the man's eyes. George leaned in again to place a kiss at the corner of Alex's mouth, "Because I knew that if I did, chances were I'd send the others home, and that would hardly be fair. I don't know what it is about you, Alexander, but you draw me in. I told myself I wouldn't be drawn in by beauty and heated looks, but then you started to actually talk to me and show me ideas that no one had dared to share with me before, and I think that was the moment I was properly captured."

"That was weeks ago."

"I know."

Alex took in a breath, "If I told you to, would you choose me, officially? Right now?"

"I think I would."

He shook his head, "You can't do that, you need to give the others a fair chance. This might have just been a fantasy for you. I was serious when I said I don't even know if I want this."

George stepped away, so that was some space between them, "I don't think that's it at all, Alexander. I am a man who knows himself. I know what I want, and what I want is you. But I'll give you the time to think about it, and I'll even seriously consider the rest of the candidates. But I'm going to start narrowing it down. I can't keep this going on forever. The longer I draw it out, the more reasons I have to give for doing so."

Alex nodded, "That is more than fair."

George nodded again, before leaning in and pressing once more kiss to Alex's lips, and then the King moved his head lower until he kissed right at Alex's pulse point. He then pulled away, "Now, you've hardly broken any rules, but I'm afraid I'm a rather possessive man. My dearest Alexander, might I know who left this mark?"

He swallowed. He could lie - he could say it was Maria or Gouverneur. They might be switched to a different position if George deemed it necessary, but nothing more would come of it. Alex didn't

know what would happen to John. He thought he'd have more time to make the decision between George and John - didn't realize what the King thought of him.

But if Alex made the decision to stay in the palace, he was going to demand a relationship of mutual respect and trust, and that needed to start now, "John Laurens."

Chapter 16

Alex walked into the parlor with his mind full of thoughts of the King, and what his confession meant for the future. Everyone had been telling him he was sure to be chosen, but it was different hearing it from the King himself.

The ball was in his court now, and all he had to do was tell George if he wanted the title or not.

All eyes were on him when he entered the room, and Alex didn't miss how everyone's eyes drifted down to his swollen lips.

He stared straight ahead and sat down in his usual place between John and Ben, daring the others to say something. John wasn't fast enough in hiding the flash of hurt that crossed his face when he took Alex in, but it was quick enough that only Alex saw it.

Ben looked as if he was about to say something, but was interrupted by Jefferson, "Huh, so that's why you're still here. I was curious, but this makes too much sense. You've been whoring yourself to the King, haven't you?"

Alex could feel the words on the tip of his tongue, waiting and demanding to be let out. He swallowed them down, playing George's words through his mind. It didn't matter what Jefferson thought, the only reason the Selection was still going on was because Alexander hadn't asked George to end it.

John didn't know that though, and he had his own anger built up that he had no problem redirecting toward his fellow candidate, "Jefferson, just because your attempts to get into the King's pants haven't been working doesn't mean everyone is using your strategy."

Alex snorted, the King would not be taking Jefferson to bed, ever.

"Laurens, you must be blind. Look at him - unless he managed to find a guard to press him up against the wall on the walk back from the dining room, he was definitely on his knees for the King - offering his mouth like the whore that he is."

John stood up, and walked forward until he could press a finger to Jefferson's chest. Alex wanted to go stand by his side, but was held back by Ben.

"Let's say you're right, Thomas, and the King simply used his private meal with Alex as an excuse to bend him over a table or have him on his knees or whatever image you're conjuring in your mind. But guess what - that's literally what we're here for. This is a Selection for the position of consort, we're all here to be the King's whore - don't be angry because you're not his favorite."

Jefferson opened his mouth, but no words came out.

Burr stood up from where he was sitting and walked over, "You both have valid points, and tensions have been getting higher as more time goes by. John's right in that we all stepped into this palace with the expectation that the King would probably at one point take us all to bed. To my knowledge, he has yet to do that. I was under the impression that the King was choosing to run this Selection differently than in years past, but perhaps he was just waiting until he had his options narrowed down. Alex was his first private meal, maybe he's taking this time to test the intimate compatibility."

Alex knew that Burr was smart - the man's intelligence showed through even in casual

conversation - but this was the first time he'd seen it put in action. Every thing he said was careful and calculated, and all of it valid. And yet, listening to him speak, one would have no idea where his personal stance was. He'd make a fantastic lawyer if he ever considered lowering himself to working a real job.

Burr's interruption also raised some questions for Alex. He was the first to dine with the King. It could have been a test, and the others could soon be having the same exact conversation with the man. He had let his hopes get up - he had dared to believe everything the King had said.

The kiss had felt so real, and his stomach started to turn at the possibility that it might not have been.

The King would be sharing one meal a day with one of the candidates. Alex would have to watch for the others - check for swollen lips, mussed hair, and bruised necks. But even no physical contact didn't mean that words weren't said. But the King had asked to kiss him; he'd want to kiss the others too, wouldn't he? What if it had been some sort of test, and Alex had failed by agreeing to the contact?

Neither John nor Jefferson said anything after Burr finished talking, but Alex could tell by the way John tensed his shoulders that he wanted to.

Jefferson and John both walked back to their seats, and Alex leaned to rest his head on John's shoulder in an attempt to calm him down. It must have worked because John turned his head and pressed his lips to Alex's hair, and stayed in that position.

Ben gave them a weird look, and then raised an eyebrow in question, Alex mouthed, "I'll tell you later." Ben nodded, and then asked, "So, Alex, how did the breakfast go?"

"Well. I didn't know what to expect, but my meetings with the King have never been unpleasant, so while I was nervous I wasn't too worried. He started by asking me how the weekend home with Lafayette was - did you know his first name is Gilbert? And then he asked me how I felt about the whole next in line for the throne thing."

John's arm found its way wrapped around his shoulders, and Alex realized that to an onlooker they probably looked quite intimate.

Ben leaned in and rested his head on Alex's other shoulder. Alex melted into the contact, and warmth from both sides. He missed cuddling with Hercules, and would have encouraged this earlier if it wasn't for John.

John who he'd slept with the previous night and told the King about it. If what George said was true, John would be leaving soon. Perhaps that'd be the first test to see if the King would be playing the same card for all of them - the sooner John left the likelier it was that George had been honest with his feelings.

With the new closeness, Ben didn't need to speak any louder than a whisper, "Alex, that's very nice, but that doesn't explain everything else."

"Everything else?"

Alex felt a sharp jab to his stomach, and heard Ben say, "You know what I mean."

He sighed, "Yeah, I know. I was leaving, he had just finished saying he had a busy schedule, so I took that as a sign to go. But before I could leave he asked if he could kiss me."

John's fingers curled into his arm, and he couldn't prevent the small wince, "John, stop. Don't act like you're allowed to be bothered by this." John's hand relaxed, but his eyebrows furrowed, and he said nothing.

Ben shot him a concerned glance, but saw his grimace and the shake of his head, and said, "So he kissed you? That's it?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Was it any good?" Ben was smirking.

Alex nodded, "Dude, I would have happily gotten on my knees for the man on live television had he so much as hinted at the fantasy if it meant I got him to kiss me again." John tensed again, but Alex kept looking at Ben, "It was everything I could have wanted, honestly."

Ben's brows raised, "You're not lying?"

"Not at all."

"Was it good enough that if he asked you to marry him right then you'd say yes?"

If only Ben knew. Alex shook his head, "I'm not so sure about that, but he did tell me that if I asked him he might actually say yes."

John broke his silence, "You can't be serious."

He shrugged as much as he was able, "It's up to you whether you believe me or not, dude."

The topic was soon dropped, as Alex and Ben didn't want to make John any more tense than he already was. Ben shot him concerned glances as the day went on and John's hold didn't let up, but Alex told him he'd explain it later.

Lafayette shared lunch with the Candidates, and made his way over to Alex, Ben, and John after talking with Jefferson and Burr. He was as graceful as ever as he walked over and took a seat. He leaned over and placed a kiss on both Alex's and Ben's cheek, before he turned to John, "John, can we talk for a moment?"

John nodded, and stood to follow Lafayette through a side door.

Twenty minutes later, Lafayette returned without John in tow, "That's taken care of, so now we can talk like friends."

In Lafayette's absence, they had moved to a spot underneath a large tree in the garden, and Alex was sitting between Ben's legs leaning against his chest. Lafayette took a place to Ben's side, and moved so he was half leaning against Ben with his head on Alex's shoulder.

Lafayette's hair was tickling his face, so Alex stared straight ahead when he asked, "Was John sent home?"

"John Laurens will not be attending dinner, or any meal after, I imagine."

Ben's hand was playing with the grass, "Does this have to do with why John was acting so weird earlier?"

"I did not ask John why he was acting the way he was earlier," Lafayette said, shaking his head, "but I know that there are several reasons going into John leaving, some of where were decisions

that were made upon seeing his name based on past interactions.”

That was new to Alex, “Wait, really?”

Lafayette nodded, “Yes. He’s always been very rash, and his temperament isn’t one that’s suited for the role of consort. You and him are very similar, Alex, but the difference is that he’s never had to work for anything, he’s simply accepted his training and the role into which he was thrown. Both of you would likely hate the political side and having to interact with the nobility, but you’d be able to go through with it because you’d see where it can take you. John would do it out of obligation, and his manners might be more practiced, but they’ll become practiced to the point of monotony. The King wants someone at his side who is always looking forward.”

Ben seemed as surprised as he was, “Wait, you mean that most of who is staying and going is already figured out?”

“For the most part,” Lafayette’s voice was softer, “we have a general idea. We’re always willing to be surprised, but we’re not expecting to be. There were a few we had no idea about, you and Alex among that number for obvious reasons, but those we’ve interacted before were easy to label ahead of time.”

Alex’s voice was quiet, “The royal we.”

Lafayette nodded, “Yes, it’s myself, the council, and the King who discuss the Selection. The King isn’t very much into all the gossiping and discussions, and instead relays any thoughts he wants to share to myself or one of his closer advisors personally. The council are all pushing for their own agendas, and one must take everything they say with a grain of salt.”

“And what about you? What’s your role?”

Lafayette shoved his head toward the two of them, “Well, I thought I was being fairly transparent about the whole thing - I’m here to get to know everyone personally. I get a feeling for how the candidates would actually fit in with the family - both private and public settings. After all, the winner will be my step-father in a weird way I don’t quite want to think about.”

That was not something Alex had considered.

They could not spend all their time in the garden hiding from the rest of civilization, and there was an awkwardness in the air when the others realized that John was not coming back. Alex had expected Ben to question him about it more, but he didn’t, and Alex was grateful.

The next day started as any other day did. His servants didn’t speak to him, acting much as they had when Alex first moved into his chambers. He wasn’t comfortable interrupting the silence, but he didn’t want their friendship to break over his own mistake, “John has been removed from the Selection, and I’m okay with it. Yesterday I kissed the King during our shared meal, and he told me that my chances of making it through the Selection are much greater than I initially believed. I now just have to decide if I want to,”

They didn’t say anything, but Maria’s hands were gentler as they worked through his hair, so he counted it as a victory of some sort, even if he didn’t know what for.

It was Burr’s day to take breakfast with the King.

Burr didn’t show up for lunch, and his absence was explained by Lafayette over their meal, “Lord Burr thought it wise to act on his belief that his Majesty was tasting all the candidates and stepped over the bounds of propriety. Normally, a single act would not be enough to send one of you home

- every decision is very carefully calculated based on history, personality, look, and actions - but the King personally demanded Lord Burr be sent home as a message.”

Ben had turned to him with wide eyes, realizing that Alex’s obvious activities yesterday meant something more than the initial assumption. Alex was just as surprised, but at the realization that the King was telling at least some truth about his place among the Candidates.

Jefferson must have reached a similar conclusion, for his wide eyes narrowed to slits when they settled on Alex. He would have been much more worried for his future were the man’s doppelganger not sitting less than five feet away from him holding the role of son to the man they were competing to marry.

Alex hadn’t been paying much attention to Arnold at all during the past couple of weeks, but he regretted that when the man in question suddenly stood up and pushed his chair away from the table, face red, “I have had enough of this. I didn’t ask to come here, but when I was chosen I thought it’d be a good opportunity - why, I don’t know. My father convinced me it was, and I believed him. But this is beyond ridiculous, everything is so underhanded. I am leaving, I don’t care if I’m technically allowed to or not. I’ll have the servants clean up after me, but I am never coming back if I have any say in the matter.”

Arnold stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Lafayette clapped his hands, “Well, three candidates eliminated in two days, isn’t this getting fun?”

Chapter 17

Ben followed Alex to his room after dinner the day that Burr and Arnold left. Alex had smiled at Maria when he walked in, and told Gouverneur to hold off on starting his bath until later.

Ben and Alex were sitting on his bed, picking at some fruit that Edward had sent for when Ben said, “Hey, you never really told me exactly what happened with John, you know.”

Alex reached up to run a hand through his hair, “Yeah, I know, I was kind of waiting for you to bring it up again. Well, you know he kind of had a thing for me, right?”

Ben nodded.

“He kissed me one night, but afterward I just kind of sent him away? I told him we could think about it after the Selection was over.”

“Did you mean it?” Ben asked, picking up a strawberry.

Alex shrugged, “I don’t know.”

“How do you not know?”

He grabbed a grape, and stared at it, “Too many options,” and popped it into his mouth.

“Is that all that happened?”

Alex shook his head, “Nope.”

Ben threw the leafy part of the strawberry he had bitten into on the plate and grabbed another, “So what actually made him act all weird? John’s not stupid, he knows you’re in the Selection, you weren’t just going to be exclusive if he asked, not when the King’s the other suitor.”

Alex grabbed another grape, “The other night I was sitting here, getting ready for bed after taking my bath, and then John came in - going on about how he was going to be going home soon.”

“Okay? Was that a normal thing? Him randomly stopping by?”

Alex shook his head, “Nope, not really. Anyway, he started telling me he wanted to taste me one last time before he left and all that. I don’t know man, I make bad decisions in the moment.”

Ben’s eyes were wide, “You slept with him? With John? Was the hickey from John?”

Alex nodded slowly, and watched as Ben nibbled at another strawberry and gathered his thoughts. Ben got through two berries before he said, “You had sex with John, he acted really possessive and clingy and weird the next day, and then he went home.”

“That about sums it up.”

Ben shoved at his arm hard enough that he fell onto his back on the bed, “I cannot believe. Wait, does the King know? Is that why he went home? Are the Candidates not supposed to have sex with each other? What did you do wrong?”

Alex let out a breath and stared at the ceiling, “The King knows, though whether that be because of some super secret spy system or because I told him, I don’t know. I do think that’s part of it, but I

do think that John was set to be sent home soon anyways - John knew it too. I can't say for certain what was the final straw for John. I think I'd be a little upset if I found out the King is the one who sent him away just because he gave me a hickey, but George did say he's a possessive man, so I guess he kind of warned me. And there aren't any rules against the Candidates doing anything with each other, to my knowledge."

Ben moved so he was lying on the bed next to Alex, "George?"

"Yeah, he told me to call him George in private."

"Huh. So, uh, back to the other thing - does that mean I could kiss you right now?"

Alex turned his head to look at Ben, and was surprised to find that Ben looked completely serious, "Why?"

Ben's eyes darted down to his lips, but then back to his eyes, "I don't have a crush on you or anything like that, I promise. You're nothing more than a friend, really. It's just, there's a part of me that really wants a sloppy makeout, and there's also this romantic voice in the back of my mind asking me what if I found true love here and it's staring my right in the face and I'm passing it up with delusions of a crown because I'm not really looking at the kid who's become my closest friend."

Alex closed the gap between them, tilting his head and touching Ben's full lips with his. The kiss didn't last very long, and Alex pulled away and said, "This is unexpected. I didn't expect John, or George, but this is even more different. If you're looking for a no-strings attached makeout sesh, I'm here. But I'm afraid that any romantic musings will need to be kept to yourself until I sit down and actually take the time to figure out my life."

His friend blinked, and then Alex found a hand on each side of his face, and a new pressure on his body as Ben moved on top of Alex and situated himself in between Alex's legs, "You can figure out your life later, for now please just kiss me."

"Benjamin Tallmadge, are you horny and turning to your troubled friend in your time of need?"

Ben leaned down and connected their lips again, and the rolling of his hips against Alex's was all the answer Alex needed.

A little less than a hour later, Alex was sitting in the bath with Gouverneur's hands in his hair.

"Alex, sir, why is this becoming a common occurrence?"

Alex shrugged, "I don't know, I guess I'm irresistible."

The next day it was Ben's turn to share breakfast with the King, leaving Alex alone in a room with Jefferson. He was looking forward to talking with Ben about how the meal went, and trying to figure out just what the King was doing.

Jefferson had walked into the room after his meal as confident as ever, and told Alex and Ben just how great his meal had gone. He'd said something about the King eyeing him with lust over coffee, but restraining himself like the gentleman he was. Jefferson reminded them that he learned from Burr's mistakes and didn't act on the man's desire.

If Jefferson had been anyone else, Alex would have been concerned. But Jefferson was not only trying to show off to the point of absurdity, but Alex knew that the King had no intentions of taking Jefferson to bed. That was one thing he could hold belief in - even Lafayette had said he'd

be uncomfortable with Jefferson taking permanent residence in the palace, and Lafayette's opinion held a lot of weight.

Of course, Jefferson couldn't leave Alex alone to his journal, and broke the silence, "You know, you're only here because it looks good for the palace to keep on people with humble backgrounds, right?"

Alex set down his pen and looked up, "Ben's not noble either, Jefferson. Are you saying that the both of us are just placeholders for you?"

Jefferson shook his head, hair moving with the motion, and walked over and sat in Ben's usual place next to Alex, "Nope, I think Tallmadge has a chance. If the King really knew who he wanted already, we'd know by now."

"Really?" Alex raised a brow, "Do you think I'm the placeholder then?"

Jefferson waved his hand, "I think between the three of us, it's most likely you, yes."

"Why?"

Jefferson leaned in closer and said, "Well, like you said, both you and Ben aren't noble. The Jeffersons have always been second place to the Washingtons, since our country was founded. I wouldn't be surprised if he was keeping me here to emphasize that - politics and all that. But Ben is beautiful, strong, intelligent, and he can hold back his temper and give respect where respect is due. You, while you're not ugly, hardly turn heads the same way. You're not stupid, but there's something about you that tells me you're always too close to a fight."

Jefferson's face was awfully close, and his lips were rather inviting, and Alex wondered what would happen if he just leaned in. He'd kissed John, George, and Ben - why not add Jefferson to the list?

Before he could give in to the impulse, Lafayette and Ben burst through the door, and Jefferson pushed away from Alex and stood up. Ben looked confused as he took Jefferson's place, and Lafayette looked amused.

Alex was fine with not continuing his conversation with Jefferson, and would have preferred it so he could forget the brief urge to kiss Jefferson, but Jefferson did not feel the same, "So, Lafayette, Alex and I were talking about the competition, and I was wondering what's your opinion on us three? I like to think we're all close enough to speak honestly with each other."

Lafayette hummed and crossed his legs, staring at Jefferson. He didn't say anything for a couple of moments, but then said, "Well, going off my own conversations with the King, I believe that one of you is looking to come out of this the winner. The council disagrees, but the council has also been very hands-off, surprisingly, so I'm not sure how much their opinion matters."

"Does the council have to agree with the King's choice?" Ben asked, "Why hasn't he just announced it yet?"

"Well, he has to question his own choice, you know. This is the person he's intending on spending the rest of his life is - and while he could deal with a more professional style arrangement, that's not what he really wants. You've all had a meal with him at this point - from now on, I imagine they'll get a bit more date-like. He really does want to get to know you all before reaching a decision."

Thomas stood and moved to a chair that was closer to Lafayette, and asked, "But what about the

council?”

Lafayette shook his head, “The council doesn’t not need to agree for the decision to be made, however that’s a mere technicality. The council needs to approve of the consort to prevent tensions from growing.”

So Alex needed the council to like him. He turned to Lafayette, “So from here on out it’s basically going to be dates with the King, and interviews from the council and such since I assume they’re going to start becoming more involved.”

The look in Lafayette’s eye told Alex that he knew exactly who the top choice was right now, and Alex smiled back at him.

Alex turned to Ben, leaving Jefferson and Lafayette to their own conversation, “So, how was breakfast?”

Ben blushed, “It was nice. It was a normal conversation, and he kissed my hand before I left.”

Alex smiled, “What do you think of the King? Personally, I haven’t quite made up my mind yet.”

“Well, he’s very handsome.” Ben looked thoughtful, “But I don’t think I’ve really gotten to know him at all. I’m not sure how comfortable I’d be agreeing to be Consort if I was chosen, honestly.”

Hours later, Alex found himself in the garden again, writing a letter to Hercules, using his journal as a sort of writing desk. He looked up when he found himself in shadow, and was surprised to find the King, “Your Majesty, I was not expecting you.”

The King chuckled and smiled, “I thought I told you to call me George. And this is hardly an expected visit. I was walking through the gardens, and you caught my eye. Might I join you?”

Alex closed his journal and placed it on the bench beside him, “Of course.”

George sat down next to Alex, and closed his eyes, basking in the sun, “I think I’ve missed you.”

He let himself admire the King, “You think?”

George opened his eyes and turned to stare at Alex, “Oh yes, certainly. After you left, I immediately wished for your return. It was for less than innocent reasons, I’ll admit - the taste of your skin and your lips is addicting - but also I missed our conversation. You’re very upfront and honest with me, and I don’t think I realized how lacking that was in my life until I met you.”

Alex reached his hand over the play with the man’s cuff on his shirt, and looking down at his hand, he said, “I don’t think you know me enough to miss me, but I’ll let you get away with your talk of longing for my kisses.”

George smiled, and reached his hand under Alex’s chin and guided it until Alex met his gaze, “You’ll let me?”

Alex tried to nod, but when he realized he couldn’t, he said, “I suppose.”

This close Alex could smell the King, a detail he hadn’t noticed before. If the man didn’t come with so much responsibility attached, he’d have no problem admitting how much he wanted to be enveloped by the scent and wrapped in George’s arms.

He didn’t have to admit it to get what he wanted, as George ran his thumb over Alex’s lips to ask

for permission, and when Alex parted his lips in response, George leaned in.

Alex didn't stop the quiet moan that left him, and leaned into George when he found strong arms pulling him forward. Alex moved so he was straddling the King, and pulled away for much needed air, "George, we're in the middle of the garden."

The King pressed a kiss to the side of his neck, and moved one of his hands much lower down his back, "I know where we are, Alexander."

"What happened to wanting to get to know me?"

George chuckled against his neck, "You yelled at me and told me I'm only allowed to want to kiss you."

"That isn't quite what I said."

George pulled away, "Do you want to stop? We could take a walk along the path, if you wish. In fact, I wouldn't mind doing that at all."

Alex shook his head, "No," and leaned forward, "but I might take you up on that walk at a later date."

"Why later?"

Alex smirked and rolled his hips at George's laugh, feeling smug when the King let out a deep groan, "Because I don't believe I'll be composed enough for a walk through the garden."

They didn't do anything beyond kissing, despite George's hardness Alex could feel beneath him. After a time, they had stopped, and just sat there, not saying a word. Alex knew that his lips were swollen again, and George had made a point to leave a mark or two on his neck.

"George, I imagine you have to get going soon."

The King nodded, "Soon, yes. I needed this. I'm having dinner with you tomorrow. I expect you to know that I fully intend to romance you, and leave you with nothing more than a kiss at the door."

Alex smiled, "I look forward to it."

Chapter 18

The dinner had gone exactly as George had described. Alex had been dressed in finer clothing than usual by Gouverneur, and then led to a table in the gardens. It was lit only by the moon and some candles, and there was someone playing a cello, and servants pouring wine. It was the sort of thing Alex had only seen in movies.

The conversation had come easier than Alex expected. Part of him had been hoping it'd be awkward, as they conversed like any two people might on a date. But it wasn't. They talked about their families, and their days. Alex learned that George had been close to his brother, and that he missed Martha, but that George knew that they'd both like to see him move on with his life if they were here. George seemed to think that Martha would like him, and Alex took it as the compliment it was meant to be.

The King had walked him back to his rooms, and placed a chaste kiss on his lips in front of his door. It was the sort of thing that teenaged girls and boys dreamed up for themselves, and it was Alex's reality.

The night proved that they could converse about things other than Alex's opinions on the government, and could do so without one of them ending up pressed against a wall somewhere. It was the sort of thing Alex hadn't really found in a partner before, and it was the sort of thing that only made him more stressed. If he wanted to pursue this, he'd have to accept everything that came with it.

Alex was surprised when after getting ready for the day, he was greeted at the door by a guard, "Hello sir, I have been instructed to show you to the council room today."

Ben and Jefferson were sitting on a sofa in a small room that Alex expected would lead into the council's chambers. He sat in the space between them, "Do you know what's happening?"

Ben shook his head, but Jefferson said, "Not for certain, but I'm guessing we're about to get interrogated by the council. Usually the interactions between council members and candidates are much more discreet - I imagine they must be worried that the King is going to be making his decision soon."

"Is the King going to be there?"

Jefferson frowned, "Probably not."

A door opened, and a servant called for them to come over. When they walked in, they were guided to chairs around a table, where three other men already sat. Alex recognized Von Steuben, and smiled at the man in recognition. He got nothing more than a twitch of the lips in acknowledgement. Alex guessed that if Von Steuben were there, the other two men were Lords Schuyler and Adams.

There was an exchange of nods and weighted glances, but the three Lords maintained their serious expressions as the three candidates waited for the interrogation to begin.

The man in the middle cleared his throat, "Thank you for joining us. I am not familiar with two of you, so I shall introduce myself, I am Lord Adams and act as the head of the council for our King. I brought in Heir Jefferson to the palace for the purpose of being brought before his Majesty as a potential consort. Benjamin Tallmadge and Alexander Hamilton are names that are unknown to

me, and what I know I know from the whisperings that have been going around the palace. Use this as your opportunity to put yourselves in my favor.”

Alex nodded. He looked over at Jefferson and saw that Jefferson didn't seem to be encouraged by Adams' words. There was something about the Lord that rubbed him the wrong way. He couldn't pick out any single thing, and Adams hadn't said enough for Alex to get a proper handle on his opinions and actions. Nonetheless, Adams' beady eyes reminded Alex of some of his professors that refused to pay him any mind on the basis that he came from nothing. Alex had always managed to win out against those professors with arguments and essays and shows of ethic. Few liked him, but they respected what he was capable of in an academic setting. He had the feeling Adams wouldn't be as easy to sway.

A moment passed, and then the man on the left spoke, “I am Lord Philip Schuyler, and I brought in Mr. Tallmadge. I brought him in on the basis of what I've learned of our King's preferences during my friendship with the man. I know Heir Jefferson from outside the Selection. All three of you hold potential, or else you would not be here. I wish to hold some sort of working relationship with the Consort, so I will be looking for that compatibility and will consider that when advising the King on his decision.”

Lord Schuyler smiled at Ben, and Alex found himself warming up to Lord Schuyler. He seemed strict, but fair and unafraid to show a sign of kindness. Lord Schuyler seemed the type of man Alex could grow to respect. From what he could remember from the ball, Alex could see where his daughters took after their father in appearance.

And then Von Steuben made eye-contact with Alex and started to speak, “I am the Baron Friedrich Von Steuben. I am one of the King's chief advisers in political and personal endeavors. I find myself more personally invested in this Selection than perhaps I should, so keep that in mind. My goal is to look through all three of you until I get to see who you really are. It's not just how you present yourself that matters, but what you hide away. Very few know who the King actually is, and I myself have seen only a glimpse. But off that glimpse and off of whatever I see in you is how I will form my opinions. The process of elimination tells you that I brought in our dearest Alexander.”

The endearment was heard by all, and Alex didn't know if that was a good or bad thing. He gave no outward acknowledgement.

Adams cleared his throat again and opened the folder he had in front of him on the table, “To begin, we are going to go over your backgrounds to get a clear idea of where you're coming from. Heir Jefferson is the next in line to receive the Lordship of the Jefferson family, located in Virginia, part of the Southern Court. Is there anything else you'd like to add, Heir Jefferson?”

Jefferson was standing stiffer than Alex had seen before, and there was a set to his shoulders and a mask over his features that made Alex think he was seeing the man's metaphorical armor. Jefferson nodded once and said, “In addition for my studies to fulfill my role as Lord later in life, I have studied abroad in France and have visited with their courts, so I consider my familiarity with the French to be important when discussing my background.

The smile that crossed Adams' face was a nasty thing, “Very well, Heir Jefferson.”

Adams turned to look at Schuyler, who said, “Mr. Benjamin Tallmadge is from New York, and is a member of no court. He attends Yale University, and is incredibly intelligent, beautiful, and poised.”

Ben appeared to be flattered, though Alex saw the unamused look in his eyes before he directed his

gaze downward. Alex knew that Ben was intelligent, and had personally seen some of his observational skills in action. But this was completely different - Ben was playing a game, and judging by Schuyler's smug grin, the man knew and encouraged it. Ben was here to get Adams' and Von Steuben's approval, and Schuyler had told him how to do it.

Adams would approve of Ben because he'd see Ben as malleable. Von Steuben wouldn't hate him for George, but no doubt wouldn't approve of the others' machinations unless he found himself in control of the strings.

Ben was the council's choice, and Alex was the King's.

It was Von Steuben's turn to speak, "Mr. Alexander Hamilton was born on the U.S. Virgin Isles, bastard of one of the sons of the Scottish Hamiltons of Grange. Deaths in the family and a hurricane meant he had to learn to provide for himself, and with the help of a family friend, did just that. He got an acceptance letter and a scholarship to Columbia University, and there he stayed until we brought him here."

Alex bit the inside of his cheek; Von Steuben made it sound so simple.

Adams saw this as the opportunity to get in the the questions it appeared he was quite impatient to ask, "So, Hamilton, what right do you have to be here? You're hardly American, and a bastard is worse than a lowborn. You've just been taking advantage of people's hospitality to get what you want. That's hardly the qualifications needed for our King's consort, unless you've picked up some more unsavory skills along the way."

Alex bit the inside of his cheek harder, and he could taste the blood in the inside of his mouth. He focused himself to relax, and took in a quiet breath before answering, "Lord Adams, I have just as much a right as my fellow Candidates. If I wasn't meant to be in the running, I wouldn't be. I am a citizen of this country, and I don't see what my social standing has to do with my character. Manners and traditions can be learned, sir. And I'll have you know that I resent the implication that I've been whoring myself out in order to find any measure of success."

Lord Schuyler seemed surprised, and Friedrich looked taken aback but entertained. Neither of their reactions compared to Adams, "How dare you speak to me in such a manner? I said no such thing! I asked you a simple question, and this is how you answer me? This just goes to show that the palace and courts are not where you belong!"

Alex's knuckles were white from how hard they were clenching the arms of the chair he was sitting in, and he felt a comforting hand on his arm. He was surprised to look to find it belonged to Jefferson, who was still wearing his mask and looking straight ahead.

He took in a deep breath and looked at Steuben, who shook his head slowly. Alex nodded back and forced himself to calm down. He couldn't give Adams any more to complain about.

Lord Schuyler opened his own folder, "Heir Jefferson, I ask you the same question, if perhaps worded differently. In your own words, what right do you have to be here? Beyond that, what would make you the perfect consort?"

Jefferson's tone was perfectly neutral, "Practice. Where Hamilton is not well-suited to social interactions where tensions are high and egos large as found among nobles due to a lack of practice, I grew up in such a setting and am very familiar with them."

"Is that all?" Lord Schuyler didn't look very impressed.

Jefferson nodded.

The questions were very much like an interview - broad questions offering them the opportunity to go in almost any direction. Their views were questioned, and past actions were brought to attention. They were seeking stories to support the opinions and choices the candidates shared. Alex found himself unnerved by the sheer amount of information available about his life, but was amused by how much of his file Adams didn't read.

They were dismissed after a little less than three hours, but before Alex could follow Ben and Jefferson out of the door, Von Steuben guided him into a side room. It was small and cramped, and most likely some sort of closet or part of a passage.

The barons' breath was hot on his face, "Alex, I have so much hope for you, and I see that you're starting to understand just how close you are to the end. But that doesn't mean you can say those things to men like Adams. It's not the behavior they're looking for. I know that to you it might seem tame, but it shows them that you have an edge and you're willing to fight. What George wants and what Adams wants in the Consort are two different things. You have to be careful what parts of you are shown to what people."

Alex nodded, "I understand that, I really do. But I can't have them thinking I'm going to be pushed around. And I couldn't let him go on like my own skills were worth nothing."

Friedrich chuckled, "Now, I wouldn't say he said your skills were worth nothing - rather the opposite in fact. There are so many who are willing to sleep their way to the top, but to be successful at it, you must be quite talented."

"Hmmm."

The baron patted the top of Alex's head, "Now, I'll surely be seeing you again soon. I had intended to tell you all sorts of things, but I think you've done a grand old job ensnaring the King. Off with you - us council members have things to discuss with his Majesty."

Alex nodded, and left the stuffy room as quick as he was able. He nodded his head when Lord Schuyler smiled at him as he walked by. He left the chambers and leaned against the wall in an alcove off of the hallway. He forced his eyes to shut, and let himself focus on the pressure and blackness.

He was pulled away from his thoughts when he felt a hand ensnare his wrist. Alex opened his eyes to find the King standing over him with a concerned look on his face, "Alex, is everything okay?"

The genuine concern was unexpected, but it made Alex smile, "It's fine. I just got a little overwhelmed. We've been pretty cut-off from the rest of the world, sheltered from the political reality of life in the palace. It takes a lot of effort to restrain my temper at times, and I'm just a little exhausted from it right now."

The King's free hand went to the side of his face, and Alex let himself lean into it, "What happened?"

"We were all asked to provide our own explanations for our opinions and such, nothing terribly invasive. I suppose I'm still sensitive about my background, and Adams seems to be particularly against me."

George nodded, "I could see how you and Adams might not get along."

"That's an understatement." Alex chuckled, "Thank you."

George pressed a kiss to corner of his mouth, “You are always welcome, Alexander. I’m afraid that I must leave you now.”

Alex turned his head to press a kiss to the inside of George’s palm and nodded.

He went back to his room, ignored Maria’s and Gouverneur’s concerned questions, and plopped on his bed, face down in his pillow.

Alex didn’t plan on falling asleep, but he must have, because he woke to Edward pulling on his arm, “I hate to wake you, because you seem like you need the rest, but the King’s here and I can’t turn him away.”

He didn’t know what he expected from the visit, but it was not George kneeling on the floor before him while Alex fought back a yawn.

The King covered Alex’s knees with his hands, and looked up at Alex, “I need to know if I tell the council I am still deciding, I know who I am going to choose, or if I tell them that the Selection was a failure. I’m choosing you, Alexander. It’s up to you whether or not you’ll have me.”

Alex leaned forward and pressed his forehead against the King’s, “There’s still a part of me that is yelling at myself to say no, because I came here wanting to satisfy my competitive streak. I still don’t really know you, and you don’t really know me - not really, you can’t say we do. But there’s such a large part of me that wants to love you, and I’m closer than I should be to that. This is so different from where I ever pictured my life heading, but I think I want to. It’ll be a difficult process, and the road won’t be smooth, but it’s one I want to travel, with you.”

George’s eyes were shiny, and he pressed a chaste kiss against Alex’s lips, “You’ve thought about this.”

Alex laughed, “No, I haven’t. I’m incredibly conflicted, and I’m going to be going back-and-forth until the day I fall in love with you, George Washington. I’m letting my impulses and emotions guide me. My logic is there telling me this is ridiculous, but it’s also saying that arranged marriages have a high success rate and I want to go into politics anyway, so how is this a bad idea?”

“I don’t usually make decisions like this. I tend to put more thought into things, but just this once I’m going to go after what I really want.”

Alex pressed his lips to George’s, tracing the seam of the man’s lips with his tongue. He pulled away, “I need you to leave.”

George looked a bit hurt and even more confused. Alex kissed his cheek, “There is so much I want to do to you and for the first time we are near a bed and my self-control is almost nonexistent right now because I find this moment to be worth celebrating properly, but I don’t want to wake up to an empty bed”

The kiss George gave him was positively filthy, and the King’s hands moved from his knees to his hips, teasing with their proximity to where he wanted them most, “I wished you didn’t make sense. The mental image of you spread out beneath me is simply too much for me to handle. I must go, before I act on those thoughts. You deserve an entire night dedicated to praising your body, and I fully intend to give that to you.”

Alex whined when George pulled away, and received a grin in return.

Less than twenty minutes after George left, there was another knock at the door. Alex got up to

answer it himself, expecting it to be George or Ben.

Instead he got Adams, who looked him up and down with his mouth twisted into a sneer and said, “Mr. Hamilton, I am here to inform you that you’ve been asked to leave the palace.”

Chapter 19

Alex didn't know how the candidates were sent home, but a part of him believed it wasn't like this. The council had said that they had been rather hands off throughout the entire process, so it didn't make sense that they were the ones to ask the candidates to leave.

What Alex thought didn't matter, and within an hour his bags were packed and he found himself in a town car driving him from the palace, Adams watching as he disappeared from view.

It was late when he stumbled back into the apartment - late enough that all the lights were off and Hercules was asleep. Alex stumbled into his room, dragging his bags behind him. Gouverneur had packed him much more than what he brought, and he was pretty sure he saw Maria throw some beauty products into the mix.

He didn't bother to take off his jacket, and plopped onto the mattress. He kicked off his shoes, and with his face squished into a pillow, Alex let the tears come.

He'd couldn't believe he was stupid enough to believe the King.

Alex fell asleep like that, and he woke up with a headache and a familiar swell of motivation rising up within him. He might not be good enough for the council and King, but that didn't mean he was worthless. He just needed to work harder and faster to get the recognition he wanted. The Selection would always tarnish him, but it was something he could use to stand out and propel himself forward.

There were a great many men who would love to hear more about the King and his advisors, and how they presented themselves and acted when they thought no one was watching. This was something he could use, just as he planned to before he even stepped foot into the palace.

He was thirsty, and he stood up and tried to brush out the wrinkles in the shirt and pants he was wearing from the night before. He failed, and Alex realized he wasn't sure what the procedure was for washing to nicer fabrics.

Alex stretched, and made an effort to be silent as to not wake Hercules when he went into the kitchen to grab a glass of water. As he stood in the middle of the kitchen, his mind wandered back to the palace. Ben and Jefferson weren't awake yet if they stuck with their normal schedules, and he was curious how they'd react when they realized he wasn't there.

He heard footsteps, and he turned around expecting to see Hercules with a shocked expression on his face and a barrage of questions. Instead of his roommate, he saw Lafayette wearing a pair of boxers and covered in bruises and bite marks.

Alex set his glass down on the counter and stepped forward and poked Lafayette in the chest, "What are you doing here?"

Lafayette's eyes were wide and he shook his head, "Non, what are you doing here?"

He poked Lafayette's chest again, "I live here."

Lafayette put his hands on Alex's shoulders and leaned down to look Alex directly in the eyes, "No, you live in the palace. You have been for the past several weeks, and you shall continue to do so for the rest of your life."

“Lafayette what are you talking about? I was sent home.”

The prince’s mouth opened and closed several times before he let go of Alex’s shoulders and started to pace around the tiny kitchen while muttering obscenities in French. A few moments passed until Lafayette calmed down, “Alex, you couldn’t have been sent home.”

Alex lifted his hand up and gestured around the kitchen, “But I was, unless I’m hallucinating right now.”

Lafayette shook his head, “You’re not hallucinating, unless we’re sharing the same dream. But you couldn’t have been sent home - at least officially. I’m the one who sends the Candidates away, Alex. I technically have final say. There are some I wanted gone, and the King wasn’t attached enough to stop me. I might be ordered to ask someone to leave, but it doesn’t happen until I say the words. I need you to explain to me exactly what happened, in detail.”

Alex closed his eyes and counted to ten and then opened them and said, “I need coffee.”

Lafayette smiled, “Not a bad idea.”

He turned to fiddle with the ancient coffee pot, pouring in the water and scooping the coffee into the filter and pressing the button. After that was done, he leaned against the counter, “Before we get into what happened to me, I want to know what happened to you - why are you here? Also, who did you send home? I thought it was the King.”

A flush rose to Lafayette’s cheeks, and Alex watched as his eyes darted around the room before he said, “Uh, you know how I’ve been exchanging letters with Hercules? I had to come out to New York to talk with some local Lords, and I thought I’d stop by and say hi since I was in the area, and uh, then it kinda, well, progressed.”

“Progressed.”

Lafayette nodded quickly, cheeks still tinged pink, “Yes.”

Alex tapped his fingers against the counter, “And you’re serious about this? You might be protected by your title, and the nobility might hate me on principal at this point, but don’t think I wouldn’t do my best to ruin you should you heart Hercules in any way.”

Alex watched as Lafayette lifted his hand and rubbed the back of his neck, looking down at his feet, “Alex, I didn’t just jump Hercules when I visited him for the first time. We became friends of a sort, through the letters. I was doing my best to woo him, that is true, and I like to think it worked. We didn’t have sex or do anything like that when we met up - just got coffee and talked. I think I might love him. I know it’s going to be complicated, but if you and George can make it work, why can’t I do the same with Hercules?”

Alex sighed and said, “You’ve become a friend, Laf, and I want you to be happy. And I want Hercules to be happy. If being together brings you both happiness - I want you to have it. I’m just worried. And I don’t know what you’re talking about, but nothing has worked out between the King and I.”

Lafayette crossed his arms and shook his head again - the sight would have been intimidating had he been dressed - and said, “You’ve ensnared George, and even he doesn’t know why. Surely he’s said as much to you.”

Alex closed his eyes, and could feel them burning with a warning of oncoming tears but did his best to hold them back, “That’s what I didn’t get. Ben, Jefferson, and I were brought in front of the

council members who brought us in and they asked us all sorts of questions. It didn't go as well as it could have on my part. Last night George came to my room and told me I could stay if I wanted to - and I think I realized I did. But after he left Adams came and told me I was being sent away. I figured the council had weighed in their opinion and George had given in. Their top choice in Ben, and honestly, I could see them working."

He felt himself being tugged forward, and his face was tucked into Lafayette's neck.. He relaxed into the hug, and took comfort from the hand rubbing his back. Lafayette placed a kiss on his forehead, "Alex, Adams has always had his own agenda, and it rarely is the same as our King's. I know they like Ben - I like Ben - but Ben's not right for George, not when you're here. You're still in the running, but if you don't go back George will have to take that to mean you chose to leave - Adams isn't going to say anything. He'll either pick Ben, or end the Selection altogether."

"That's actually what he asked me - he wanted to know if he should choose me or end the process."

Lafayette squeezed him harder, "How could you believe Adams after hearing that?"

Alex shook his head, "I don't know."

He did, but he wasn't going to tell Lafayette that he still didn't believe he was meant to be the one at George's side. He had taken it as a sort of sign, he supposed. The palace wasn't where he was supposed to be, and Adams reminded him of that. Alex had to work for everything he got, and being handed love and a title was not what the universe had in store for him.

The coffee machine beep, and Alex poured himself and Lafayette mugs and moved to sit down on the sofa. Lafayette sat next to him and laid his head on Alex's shoulder. They sat in silence.

Hercules must have smelled the coffee, because he emerged from his room rubbing his eyes, dressed similarly to Lafayette. He didn't notice the two on the couch as he walked into the kitchen, and when Alex saw his roommate's back, he nudged Lafayette at the side, "Dude, do you have claws or something holy shit."

Lafayette didn't answer, but was saved by Hercules walking in before Alex could tease some more, "Alex, what the fuck are you doing here?"

"Uh, I left the palace."

"He's going back, don't worry." Lafayette's voice was muffled against Alex's shoulder, and Alex guessed it was an attempt to hide his face.

"No I'm not."

Hercules sat down on the other side of Alex, "If Laf says you are, you don't have a choice. Sorry, I don't make the rules."

Lafayette lifted his face and leaned over Alex's lap until his face was right next to Hercules', "Alex didn't leave, he was under the impression he was kicked out of the Selection. He's wrong, of course. Alex is going to marry George if I have any say, and since I have a lot of say, it's going to happen."

Hercules chuckled, and placed a kiss on the tips of Lafayette's nose, who went cross-eyed trying to stare at it, "Of course. Okay but seriously, Alex, are you okay?"

Alex took a long sip of his coffee, "I'm fine, but I'm not going back."

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t want to be consort and I barely know the King. I’m definitely not going to ruin the rest of my life on the basis that I like a man’s shoulders.”

Lafayette stood up straight, affronted, “You wouldn’t be ruining you life!”

“How wouldn’t I?” Alex’s eyes narrowed, “I’m going to be throwing away everything I expected for myself. Being consort doesn’t give me that much power, Laf. I’d be viewed as the King’s toy. I don’t know George! Sure, I had a conversation or two with him but that’s not enough time to decide whether or not I want to marry him! This is my entire life! What if we end up hating each other?”

Lafayette was shaking his head, but before he could say anything, Alex continued, “I have to earn my own position. It’s different for you - you were born into this. You’re used to it. I’m very much not. The palace has been an overwhelming experience. It’s made me realize that I want to be there, yes, but in the way I had always planned on. I won’t be respected if I got there because of some silly competition.”

Alex found his mouth covered by Hercules’ hands, and he turned to glare at his friend, “Do us all a favor and shut up. Laf knows what he’s talking about - you don’t seriously think he’s just being a romantic fool about this, do you? He knows exactly how dirty the playing field can get at the palace - he’s the one running the Selection. If he says you’re the right choice, you’re the right choice - politically and personally. You’re smarter than this, Alex. I know you’re hurt, but can you actually listen to people for once in your life?”

He bit down on his lip and stared ahead, ignoring Hercules’ and Lafayette’s concern. Moments passed, and Lafayette arranged himself over both his and Hercules’ laps to get more comfortable. Laf pressed a kiss to Alex’s cheek, before turning to Hercules, “What’s that one show you told me I had to watch with you guys if we ever got the chance?”

“Chopped.”

“Isn’t that some sort of cooking show? Why?”

Hercules laughed, “Well, yeah, but it’s great. And you have to watch it with other people so you can get angry at the chefs.”

They spent the rest of the day like that, and halfway through the first episode Alex let himself become distracted enough by it that he actually relaxed. Lafayette turned out to be very invested in flavor combinations and traditional techniques, and yelled the loudest of the three of them.

A part of Alex wanted someone to come complain and have Laf pull the crown prince card. Before that could happen, Lafayette left, giving Alex a pointed look and a warning of “You’re going to be returning to the palace before the week is out, even if I have to order the entire army to march you there.”

Lafayette wasn’t able to come in person, but he made sure to send a barrage of texts and phonecalls Alex’s way in an attempt to bring him into the palace. He answered every single one of them, but stayed in New York.

He had emailed all of his professors about his return, and every single response he received told him that according to official files, he is still a participant and as such is excused from the work by royal decree. It was one of the most frustrating this Alex had experienced in his life, even if the

voice in the back of his mind was saying that it meant he had every right to go back to the palace.

Hercules was getting annoyed with him, and kept trying to get Alex to listen to Lafayette. A part of him wanted to go back - even if just to escape the boredom and see Adams' face when he walked in - but it was getting to the point where he was motivated to stay just to be contrary.

Alex was writing a blog post - part of a series he was doing based on his journal entries while he was at the palace - when Hercules' phone rang. Alex didn't look up, but heard Hercules' usual affections for Laf and then, "Wait, you can't mean he's coming here. Should I go? Do I need to stay to provide moral support? What am I supposed to do?"

Alex's questioning look was ignored, so he turned his attention back to his computer and continued to write. Hercules hang up the phone at some point, and if Alex had been focusing on his roommate, he would have noticed the nerves that were radiating off of Hercules, but he did not.

There was a knock at the door, and Alex heard Hercules take in a deep breath and go to open the door, but still didn't look up. If it was Lafayette, he'd make himself known. If it was anyone else, Hercules would deal with it.

It was safe to say that Alex did not expect to hear a familiar voice calling his name.

George Washington looked out of place in his living room. The authority with which he held himself and the quality of everything about him did not match the hodgepodge of decor and papers strewn about. The smile on the King's face made warmth rise in Alex's chest, and he forgot why he didn't want to run back to the palace in the first place.

Alex turned to set his laptop and journal on the side table before moving to stand in front of George, "Uh, hi. What are you doing here?"

"Gilbert was very concerned about my runaway bride, his words not mine."

Alex blinked, "Um, okay. I'm not your bride though, and I didn't run away. And what about Ben? Jefferson? Adams? I don't think you're supposed to be here."

George chuckled, "No, you're not, and technically you did. Ben and Jefferson are the same as they have been, and I only know of Adams because of what Gilbert told me. And I'm the King, I can be wherever I want to." At that George stepped forward, and raised his hand with a question in his eyes. When Alex nodded, the hand went to the side of his face.

He wasn't sure why George always did that, but there was something about it that Alex loved.

"So, your Majesty, what would you have me do?"

With George so close, all Alex wanted to do was touch. The chemistry was undeniable, and the filthy thoughts of any relationship being able to work out if an effort was made started to return.

George smirked, "Well, there are a great many things I would love to have you do, but more importantly, I want you to come back with me, to the palace. You said you wanted to fall in love with me, and I want to fall in love with you, Alexander. Gilbert also told me you were quite cross about the entire thing, and I don't want you to grow to hate me for what I've forced you to do."

Alex nodded, "I don't want to grow to hate you either, and that's what I'm afraid of."

"Can I?" George's eyes darted down to his lips, and Alex knew what he was asking and leaned up, nodding.

Their kiss was broken by Hercules coughing, “This is all very nice and all, and I am happy for you because I’m not giving you the option to not leave here together - Alex, in this singular situation, you are going to let yourself believe we know what’s best for you and your happiness, and I know you - I think this is what’s best for you and your happiness. With that being said, I also don’t want to see you guys making out in my living room.”

Alex out his tongue at Hercules, “Fine,” and then turned to George, “you have to help me pack and we can talk it out.”

George nodded, and followed him into his bedroom, and sat down on the bed while Alex pulled the bags he never unpacked out of his closet, “George, I’m serious. This is a huge life decision, and I don’t want to mess it up.”

“I don’t want you to regret it. If I had my way, I’d take the time to properly court you - tradition and everything, fit for a queen. But the Selection can’t be carried out that long for one person, and due to technicalities, once the Selection is officially ended, I can’t have any of the once candidates. The Selection is ended either by sending everyone home, or with a wedding, or weddings, depending.”

Alex sighed, and sat next to the King, grabbing his hand, “I know that, it just feels so rushed.”

George rubbed his thumb over Alex’s, “That’s because it is.”

“But you still want me to come with you.”

The King nodded once, “Yes.”

Alex was silent, and he continued to play with George’s hand.

He reached a decision.

Alex brought the King’s hand to his mouth and placed a light kiss on his knuckles, “Then I suppose I shall.”

Chapter 20

Hercules smiled at the couple when they emerged from Alex's room, bags in hand, "You figured it out!"

Alex nodded, and dropped the bag he was holding to step into Hercules' open arms, "We did, or at least I think we did. If not, we'll figure it out later." Hercules squeezed him tighter, and they stayed like that until George coughed.

"I don't want to ruin your moment, but I'm afraid that Alexander and I must be leaving soon - it was hard enough getting here as it is."

Alex laughed to himself and pulled away from Hercules, whose eyes were wet, "Aw, Hercules man, don't cry. I love you, besides, I'm sure I'll be seeing you sooner rather than later. I'll come visit if I can - or you can come down to the palace, right George?"

Hercules laughed, and wiped his eyes, "Aw, Alex you already got him whipped don't you?"

Alex shrugged, "I try," he leaned in closer and whispered, "and I won't be the only one to be missing you, I'm sure. I know you, Herc, you'd totally get off on seeing Laf boss people around the palace."

There was some color in Hercules' cheeks when he turned to look at George, "Your Majesty."

George nodded his head, "Hercules."

"Alright, so I know this isn't the most usual set of circumstances, and I can't believe I'm actually doing this but," Hercules took in a deep breath to steady himself walked forward until he was nose to nose with the King, "I don't care if you're the King and you've been married for twenty years and I'm living off on some remote island because you find me annoying, I will personally seek you out and kill you in the most painful way possible before chopping your body into pieces and throwing it into the ocean if you so much as lay a finger on Alex in a way he isn't begging for. And I don't just mean physically - if a single tear leaves his eye and I find out you're the cause, I will find a way to make you pay. Do I make myself clear?"

George's eyes were wide, "Very."

Hercules nodded and stook out his hand, "Good. I really do hope you're all I've imagined you to be, and that you'll be good for Alex."

They shook hands, and as the King pulled away he said, "Me too."

Alex and George left the apartment, and Alex was unsurprised to find guards dotted along the hall and around the building as they made their way to the car, "Is there any chance of doing anything lowkey again in my life?"

George shook his head, "Not unless you manage to shake off the guards, which is not something I recommend."

"Does Lafayette do it a lot?"

"Constantly."

The drive to the palace was spent talking, with Alex leaning into George's side. A part of Alex wondered what would happen if he were to place a hand on George's knee, and slowly inch it up his thigh. But he also enjoyed hearing George talk, even if it was about less happy things.

"Martha and I weren't married for very long - she died very young. I was the bachelor king, and I had every intention of keeping it that way. But Martha was an old friend - a widow, and a woman I saw that I could fall in love with."

Alex clutched George's arm tight to his chest, "Tell me about her."

An odd smile crossed George's features, "She was incredible. Intelligent and wise, most people wouldn't describe her as a great beauty, but I thought she was stunning every moment of our marriage. She always worried over her children, and had a tendency to coddle Jackie. But it was always for the best in her mind, she loved them with all of her heart."

Alex didn't know what to say, so he nodded, and the car filled with silence until George began to speak again, "I wasn't expected to take the full five years for a mourning period. I'm not sure why I did. She told me to live my life after she left, and I listened to her for the most part. I think my mind went back to when I was younger, and people would throw themselves at me. I wanted to protect myself from that. Even the Selection provided a barrier, since it was expected that I would choose one of you. No lady after the crown would want to only be a paramour."

"I'm happy you did. Not happy about what had to happen to get us here, but I'm happy to know you, and to be here with you."

"As am I."

They returned to the palace in time for dinner. A guard handed Alex's bags off to a servant, and when Alex said, "I'm not dressed for a formal dining room" and gestured to his jeans and old t-shirt, George just placed his hand at the small of Alex's back and pressed forward, "If I say it's fine, it's fine."

Ben and Jefferson were sitting across from each other, eating their meal without a word. Jefferson's back was to them, and Alex waved at Ben. Alex stepped forward when Ben stood up, and walked around the table to give him a hug, "Ben! How's it been? I'm sure you've been very lonely without me here to brighten your days."

Ben laughed and hugged him back, "You know it! What are you doing here? I thought you left - decided it was too much pressure or something. I mean, I'm happy you're here - but how? Why? What happened? I want to know everything!"

Before Alex could reply, Jefferson spoke up, "Hamilton, what the hell are you doing here? I thought you couldn't come back once you left - you can't be here, you'll get caught."

Alex left Ben and took a seat at the head of the table, "Well, I didn't leave of my own free will. I thought I was being kicked out."

Ben looked appalled, and Jefferson remained neutral when he said, "You were either kicked out or were asked to leave, it's fairly simple."

"I was asked to leave, just not by the right person. Lafayette is the only one with the right to send someone home legitimately. I mean, I'm sure the King could too, but it's always Lafayette."

"Wait, really?" Ben asked, "If you knew that, why did you go?"

“I didn’t know that before, Lafayette told me after I got home.”

Jefferson raised a brow, “What do you mean Lafayette told you? Are you telling me I was right when I thought you were sleeping with him too?”

Alex laughed, “No - he’s sleeping with my roommate.”

It occurred to Alex when he heard George choke that perhaps Lafayette hadn’t made that known, but it was too late to take back what he said. He mentally apologized to Laf before he turned the King and smiled, “Uh, I guess you didn’t know that.”

George shook his head as he walked toward the three, “No, I did not. Hercules is a handsome man though, so I suppose I can’t fault him.” He stopped when he was standing at Alexander’s side and turned to Jefferson, “Do you mind if we join you for dinner?”

Jefferson shook his head, hair moving with the motion, “Not at all, your Majesty. I wasn’t aware you’d be joining us.”

Alex moved to sit down by Ben as George took his seat at the head of the table, and leaned back as a place setting was put in front of him by the servants who had been waiting in the background. Their glasses were soon filled with water, and George looked at Jefferson, “I wasn’t sure I was going to, it’s quite a long drive from New York.”

“What were you doing in New York?” Jefferson’s tone was pointed, and his fingers were wrapped around his fork much tighter than necessary.

George took a sip from his glass, “I was persuading Alexander to come back, of course.”

Ben almost choked, and Jefferson wasn’t much better, “Wait, what?”

The King was calm, but his voice was stern when he said, “Watch how you address me, Heir Jefferson.”

The formality must have rung a familiar chord because Jefferson sat up straight, “Of course, please accept my apology, your Majesty.”

“Apology accepted.”

The rest of the meal continued in silence, and once the plates were cleared Alex grabbed Ben’s arm, “You can ask me whatever, maybe back in my rooms? Somewhere we won’t be bothered?”

Jefferson shoved past them before they could make their way out of the dining room, and Alex shared a look with Ben before they both started laughing.

George touched his shoulder just as they were leaving and said, “both of your schedules are free for the rest of the evening, so feel free to take your meals in your rooms if you wish.” He placed a kiss on Alex’s temple and in a lower voice said, “I wish to call upon you this evening, if that is okay.”

Alex nodded, and they parted ways.

Ben didn’t say anything while walking to Alex’s room, but he could tell that Ben wanted to. Alex knocked on the door, and was pulled into someone’s chest as soon as it was opened. By the height, he could tell it was Gouverneur, and he pushed the man away with a laugh, “Ha! I knew you’d miss me!”

Ben followed him into the room, where Maria and Edward were waiting. He hugged the both of them, surprised at just how much he missed them. Edward pulled on his shirt with a frown, "The bags were dropped off and I knew you were back - they hadn't moved us out of our quarters yet - but then I saw that you hadn't even unpacked them and I knew you were going to be wearing this filth."

"Excuse me, this is a perfectly authentic t-shirt stolen from my roommate."

Maria pushed Edward to the side, "you're wearing that blasted ponytail, that's not your best look."

Alex shrugged, "Well, now that you're here, you can save me from myself."

Maria nodded, and hesitated for a second before leaning forward to kiss him on the cheek, "We'll get out of your hair for now."

The door shut behind them, and Alex laid back on the bed, sighing as he sunk into the comforter, "I didn't realize I had grown accustomed to the comforts of the palace until I was having trouble falling asleep on my lumpy mattress at the apartment."

Ben joined him, "I'm scared to go back for that reason. My mattress is shit - my roommate, Caleb, got it for free from questionable sources. He offered to tell me, but I decided I didn't want to know."

"That's disgusting."

Ben slapped his hand over his eyes and dragged it down his face, "I know."

Alex took in a breath, "So, you have questions."

"I do. First, how did you get so close to your servants?"

He chuckled, "I don't know. The first time I tried to initiate conversation they kinda pushed me away, telling me to just let them do their job. I think as the Selection progressed and I stayed they decided I was going to be here long enough to get to know. I like them, they're pretty great."

"Yeah, I think mine just decided I wasn't sticking around, or they hate me."

"I don't think anyone could hate you," Alex said, "you're too lovable."

It was Ben's turn to laugh, "Why, thank you Alex, that means a lot coming from the man who has apparently ensnared the King enough to get him to drive to New York to beg you to come back."

"Ah, yes. That."

And Alex started to ramble on about Adams and Lafayette and George showing up at his apartment and how unexpected it had been, and by the end up it he was yawning, and Ben had a determined look on his face.

"I'm leaving."

Alex sat up and looked at Ben, "No! You can't! I want you here!"

Ben laughed, "I'm not leaving you, I like to think we're actually friends, you know. But I need to leave here, the Selection and the palace. There's a part of me that is disappointed. I know that you're the one the King wants, I think I've known it for a while. But then you left and I let myself think of a future I now see is never going to happen. I just need to step away, get drunk with Caleb,

and then I'll give you a call one day and you, me, and Lafayette will all meet up - here or somewhere else - and we'll be friends. Maybe even John."

Alex nodded, "I understand, but I'm going to hold you to that."

Ben stood up from where he was laying on the bed and stretched his arms above his head. When he relaxed, he turned to look at Alex and said, "I hope that you do. And I was wondering, this is terrible of me, but could I have one kiss, before I go?"

Alex felt his brows raise, but stood up to stand in front of Ben, "Why?"

"I don't really know. Maybe I'm secretly in love with you, maybe I'm not and I just want to maintain my romantic delusions with a kiss before I leave never to return."

Alex stepped closer, and framed Ben's face with his hands, "Okay." He felt Ben's hands fall to his waist, and he leaned up and pressed his lips to Ben's.

He pulled away after a moment and smiled, and Ben smiled back.

"I guess I'll see you later?"

Ben nodded, "Yes, I'm sure Lafayette has my number somehow. Once this is all over and settled on your end, give me a call." And then Ben stepped back and walked out the door.

Alex relaxed into the familiarity of the routine of the bath and manicure, and fell asleep quicker than he had all week. Unknown to Alex, George had come to visit, but left when he saw that Alex was sleeping, but not before he leaned down to press a kiss to Alex's cheek.

The next morning Alex felt a strange sense of relief at seeing his hair styled in the way Maria had mastered but he knew he'd never be able to do on his own.

There was a knock at his door, and before Edward or Gouverneur could go to open it, Lafayette walked in, "Alexander, I hope you are decent, because I have news for you."

"What is it?"

Lafayette smiled wide, "Jefferson has been sent home and Ben asked to leave. It's official - you have won the Selection. There will be a public announcement, training, and then the wedding. After that, you're here forever."

Alex swallowed, "Training?"

The prince laughed, "Oh, yes - you didn't think it'd be as simple as giving you a crown and handing you the reins, did you?"

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The training was ridiculous.

Every single detail Alex had researched and memorized before coming to the palace was thrown out the window and replaced with explanations and novels' worth of information. He had to relearn how to walk, sit, stand, and move. His speech patterns were analyzed, and he was told what he had to change depending on what setting he found himself in.

He realized why Lafayette and George were so different than what one might expect from their publicized appearances - every breath and word was rehearsed and practiced in order to present a certain image. Alex wasn't surprised by that, but it was a different thing to be put through the paces himself.

His name was announced, and he went through another round of photoshoots the couple of days following his return to the palace. As soon as the photographers turned their backs, Lafayette had grabbed his arm and dragged him to his figurative classroom.

The tutors charged with his education were the very same that had taught Jack and Lafayette, and that was the performance they expected.

Alex delivered.

He would leave his sessions and Lafayette would greet him in the hallway and drill him, and he was expected to practice his etiquette during all meals. Alex made Gouverneur test him while he took his bath, and Maria would do the same while she did his hair.

George was as busy as he ever was, and Alex's time was occupied with everything that fell under the umbrella of training. Any shared moments became precious, and George was unable to offer any assurances of anything changing in the future. Alex fell into the pattern easily. The Selection process had been mind-numbing with the amount of free time, and he realized how much he missed having constant work.

The month passed in a blur, and the only time he had with George was during meals and in the stolen moments as they passed each other in the halls. Too many times Alex had left an alcove with hair mussed and lips swollen, burning for George's touch. He had learned to tune out the tutor's glares.

Alex didn't realize how much time had passed until the woman who had been perfecting his posture taught him how to walk down the aisle. He didn't realize what was happening until she shoved a bunch of flowers into his hand and started to count, timing his steps.

He hadn't put that much thought toward the wedding, as it had existed only as a far-off event in his mind.

His upcoming nuptials become much more real when he walked into the ballroom for his dance lesson to find George standing in the center of the floor beside his teacher. They were learning their wedding waltz - a choreographed number the teacher looked giddy at the thought of Alex performing.

They spent the day in each other's arms, being put through their paces and spinning across the floor, again and again until each motion garnered the tutor's approval. It was the longest time Alex had spent with George in weeks, and it made the process bearable. By the end of the day they had the steps memorized, and were sent away with the strict order to practice at least once a day until the wedding.

The music was still running through his head when George took his hand and led him to the library where they had their first meeting, "I had my day cleared for the lessons, and we have an hour until we are expected for dinner."

Alex squeezed George's hand, "We could skip dinner."

George laughed, "I suppose we could."

Alex was grateful when George led him to a sofa in a corner and sat down, pulling Alex onto his lap, "I thought we could take this hour to relax, I've missed you. I see you everyday, but we haven't had the chance to just sit together, I hope you don't mind."

Alex laid his head on George's shoulder, "No, this is perfect."

"We're getting married in two weeks' time," George pressed a kiss to his forehead, "and I eagerly await the day I can legally call you mine."

Alex smiled and intertwined his hand with George's that was resting on his thigh, "I'm looking forward to after the wedding. At first it was for the wedding night, but at this point I am ready to say goodbye to all of these preparations."

"I agree with you on both points." George's hand not on his thigh tugged at Alex's hair to pull his hair back to lean down and kiss him. Alex pushed up into the kiss, moaning.

He pulled away and let go of George's hand to turn around so he could straddle George's lap. Alex rocked his hips forward once he was settled, and leaned forward to bite down on George's lip when the man gasped. He wrapped his arms around George's neck, and started to kiss along his jaw, "George I, ah know this is a change in mood, but I really want to suck your dick right now."

Another gasp left George's lips, and his hands settled on Alex's hips, "Is that so?"

Alex nodded against George's neck, "Very much so."

"Well, I'm certainly not going to stop you."

He chuckled, and kissed George's chin as he made his way down to kneel before the King. Alex ran his hands up and down George's thighs, nuzzling at the fabric covering his prize, "I want you to know that my body has been aching for this since you first kissed me."

George chuckled, breathier than before as Alex unzipped his pants, "Only since the kiss? I didn't have you aching to please me the moment your first laid sight on me?"

Alex shook his head as he pulled the King's cock out from the fabric covering it, and then smiled up at George, "I want your hands in my hair, I have this moment pictured perfectly, and you're not allowed to ruin it."

"Oh?" George gasped, "and what will you have me do?"

"I am going to kiss the head of your beautiful cock, and you're going to tug my hair just so, and

then I'm going to moan prettily and your face will melt as your body is overwhelmed with the sensation." Alex did as he described, and was pleased when George did as directed.

When George looked down at Alex, he took the head of George's cock in his mouth and slowly sank down, hand wrapped around what his mouth couldn't reach. George's cock was fully hard, and Alex pulled off and kissed down the side of it, reveling in the sweet sounds George was making.

He pulled off, and kept his hand still, and smirked at George's small whine, "Now that I have you like this, splayed out in front of me, I'm going to take you deeper." George nodded as Alex continued, "I've been wondering what you sound like, and I want you to surprise me. I'm quite talented with my tongue, but you'll only get that if you pull my hair just right."

George's hand tightened against his scalp, and Alex didn't fight the sound that ripped out of his throat. George's eyes went wide, and he did it again. Alex let himself smile before he took George's cock into his mouth again, this time relaxing his throat as he took more.

Once his nose was nestled against the dark curls, Alex stayed there and swallowed. A sense of satisfaction rang through him when George's hips pushed up against him that couldn't be found anywhere else than on his knees.

He pulled off, and replaced his mouth with tracing his fingers with barely any pressure along the veins. George was panting above him, hand still in his hair.

"George, I can't help but wonder, if I told you not to cum until I told you to, would you be able to do that?"

Alex didn't expect an answer as he leaned down to take the man's cock into his mouth again, but he heard a breathless, "yes," escape the King.

He pulled up again, "Then I want you to do that."

George nodded, and Alex went back to work. Every small noise that left George made Alex want to see just how long he could drag it out.

Alex could play with that concept later. He lifted his head up once more, and continued to mouth along George's cock. Alex could tell the man was close, his heaving chest and flexing hips giving it away. He placed the head on his lower lip and caught George's eye, not a second later the most beautiful, deep wrecked sound filled the room and the thick, white streams fell on his tongue.

Alex swallowed, and sat back on his heels as he waited for George to recover. The hand that was still in his hair pulled him up, and George's mouth was being forcibly crushed against his own. Alex groaned into the touch, balling his hands in George's shirt.

He let his head fall back as kisses were peppered down his throat, interrupted only by George saying, "My dearest Alexander, you are glorious." The King's free hand was fiddling with his belt, and Alex pushed into the touch, seeking the relief.

Not a minute passed before his own leaking cock was being pulled out and worked in George's hand. The King's hand didn't leave as Alex was pushed back onto the sofa, and the hand was replaced with a tongue and lips, and Alex came with a shout.

George tugged Alex to his chest and leaned back, pulling Alex with him, "That was nice."

Alex snorted, "that's an understatement."

They laid together in silence for the rest of the hour, and walked to dinner hand in hand, ignoring the guard's pointed looks.

It was funny how despite the orders to practice the wedding choreography at least once a day, Alex didn't find himself in George's arms again until the day of the wedding.

The day had started off with a calming ritual of sorts at the hands of Gouverneur, Edward, and Maria - they had tried to bring in others, but Alex would have no one else attend to him on his wedding day.

Lafayette had walked in while Alex's hair was being curled, Hercules standing at his side. Lafayette greeted Alex with a kiss on each cheek, and Hercules had made Alex stand up to give him a hug with enough force to lift Alex off the ground.

Neither were rude enough to comment on the tears Alex had to wipe away.

The beautiful thing about spending hours practicing a single motion is that the motion eventually becomes so ingrained that no thought is required to complete the action.

Alex's walk down the aisle was perhaps the most graceful motion his body had ever performed, but he wasn't paying enough attention to take notice to that or the hundreds of people who had their eyes on him. His steps were perfectly timed and even, but his eyes and mind were only at the crowned figure waiting at the altar.

He had spent hours writing the vows - trying to figure out just what to say to capture the potential he saw in himself and George. Not enough time had passed to claim love, but it the hope that was perhaps even more beautiful. He had stayed up many a night, scribbling a pen across paper, throwing crumpled page after crumpled page against the wall in an attempt to find the right words.

For all that time, he couldn't have told you what he said while he was distracted by George's smiling eyes.

It was such a cliché, but Alex didn't have a way to describe their kiss after being declared King and Consort as anything other than the ultimate perfection - a moment that the rest of the day seemed to radiate outward from. If the day had passed in a blur, that point was the moment of utmost clarity.

When they parted, George had the widest grin on his face which Alex returned. They turned around to face the man conducting the ceremony, and a crown complementing George's own was placed upon his head.

They bowed, and then turned to face the crowd. George's hand encompassed Alex's own, and they were drowned in the sound of the cheers and trumpets as they started their walk down the aisle.

There was a single moment of peace - after they entered the palace, shielded from the public. The photographers were waiting for them in the next room, and they wouldn't be left alone for days to come as their nuptials were celebrated.

They stopped in front of a mirror, with George's hand warm at the small of his back. Alex smiled up his husband, his King, and got one in return.

It would be a difficult road, and they had much to learn about themselves and the world around them, but it was one that Alex looked forward to. He had somehow managed to pass every test, and speed his way through every trial he had encountered thus far with only himself.

There'd be many more to come, but he leaned into George's side and took comfort in the

knowledge that he wouldn't be going through them alone.

Chapter End Notes

So, this is the end! Thank you so much for reading, I hope you enjoyed it!

ADDITION [FEB 8, 2017]: I have outlined and have started writing a sequel, which I plan to start posting Feb 24

I've already written a couple of drabbles and such for this on my [tumblr](#) under the [tag for this story](#), so feel free to ask me questions about it or just drop me a line! :^))

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End Notes

This is my NaNoWriMo (add me, I'm KooKooKarli :-)) and I've been really excited to share this with you guys! I'm currently dying of stress because of the election and everything else going on in my life, so I thought, 'what better time to start posting?' I'm planning on posting once a week until "Entirely A Matter of Chance" is complete, and then I'll start posting twice a week.

Please feel free to come pester me at my tumblr: ashilrak

Let me know what you think!

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Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!